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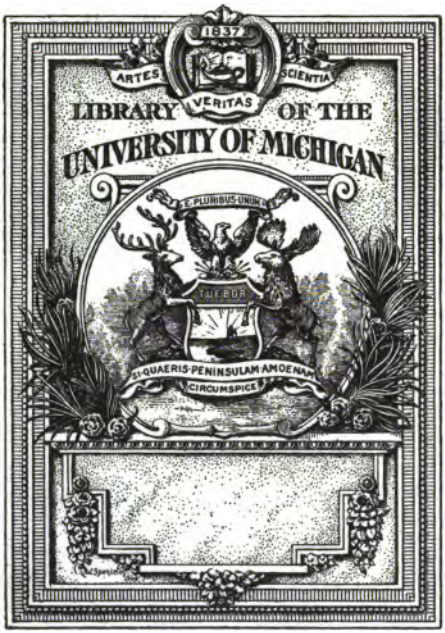

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THE

WORKS

OF

LAURENCE STERNE,

IN FOUR VOLUMES,

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

A NEW EDITION, WITH APPENDIX, CONTAINING SEVERAL UNPUBLISHED LETTERS, &c.

EDITED BY

JAMES P. BROWNE, M.D.

VOL. III.

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PREFACE.

(TO THE FIRST EDITION.)

THE Sermon which gave rise to the publication of these, having been offered to the world as a Sermon of *Yorick's*, I hope the most serious reader will find nothing to offend him, in my continuing these volumes under the same title. Lest it should be otherwise, I have added a second title-page, with the real name of the author:—the first will serve the Bookseller's purpose, as *Yorick's* name is possibly, of the two, the more known;—and the second will ease the minds of those who see a jest, and the danger which lurks under it, where no jest was meant.

I suppose it is needless to inform the Public, that the reason of printing these Sermons arises altogether from the favourable reception which the Sermon given as a sample of them in TRISTRAM SHANDY met with from the world:—that Sermon was printed by itself some years ago, but could find neither purchasers nor readers; so that I apprehended little hazard from a promise I made upon its republication, 'That if the Sermon was liked, 'these should be also at the world's service;' which, to be as good as my word, they here are; and I pray to GOD they may do it the service I wish. I have little to say in their behalf, except this, that not one of them was composed with any thoughts of being printed;—they have been hastily written,

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and carry the marks of it along with them.—This may be no recommendation;—I mean it however as such; for as the Sermons turn chiefly upon philanthropy, and those kindred virtues to it upon which hang all the Law and the Prophets, I trust they will be no less felt, or worse received, for the evidence they bear, of proceeding more from the heart than the head. I have nothing to add, but that the reader, upon old and beaten subjects, must not look for many new thoughts;—'tis well if he has new language in three or four passages: where he has neither the one nor the other, I have quoted the author I made free with.—There are some other passages where I suspect I may have taken the same liberty;—but 'tis only suspicion, for I do not remember it is so, otherwise I should have restored them to their proper owners; so that I put in here more as a general saving, than from a consciousness of having much to answer for upon that score. In this however, and everything else which I offer or shall offer to the world, I rest, with a heart much at ease, upon the protection of the humane and candid, from whom I have received many favours, for which I beg leave to return them thanks——thanks.

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SERMONS

BY

LAURENCE STERNE, A.M.

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SERMON I.

INQUIRY AFTER HAPPINESS.

PSALM iv. 6.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?—Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!

THE great pursuit of man is after happiness: it is the first and strongest desire of his nature;—in every stage of his life he searches for it as for hid treasure;—courts it under a thousand different shapes,—and, though perpetually disappointed,—still persists,—runs after, and inquires for it afresh,—asks every passenger who comes in his way, *Who will shew him any good?*—who will assist him in the attainment of it, or direct him to the discovery of this great end of all his wishes!

He is told by one, to search for it among the more gay and useful pleasures of life, in scenes of mirth and sprightliness, where Happiness ever presides, and is ever to be known by the joy and laughter which he will at once see painted in her looks.

A second, with a graver aspect, points out to the costly dwellings which pride and extravagance have erected; tells the inquirer that the object he is in search of inhabits there;—that Happiness lives only in company with the great, in the midst of much pomp and outward state;—that he will easily find her out by the coat of many colours she has on, and the great luxury and expense of equipage and furniture with which she always sits surrounded.

The miser blesses God!—wonders how any one

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would mislead, and wilfully put him upon so wrong a scent;—convinces him that happiness and extravagance never inhabited under the same roof;—that, if he would not be disappointed in his search, he must look into the plain and thrifty dwelling of the prudent man, who knows and understands the worth of money, and cautiously lays it up against an evil hour;—that it is not the prostitution of wealth upon the passions, or the parting with it at all, that constitutes happiness;—but that it is the keeping it together, and the *having* and *holding* it fast to him and his heirs for ever, which are the chief attributes that form this great idol of human worship, to which so much incense is offered up every day.

The epicure, though he easily rectifies so gross a mistake, yet, at the same time, he plunges him, if possible, into a greater; for, hearing the objects of his pursuit to be happiness, and knowing of no other happiness than what is seated immediately in his senses,—he sends the enquirer there, tells him 'tis in vain to search elsewhere for it than where Nature herself has placed it,—in the indulgence and gratification of the appetites, which are given us for that end: and, in a word,—if he will not take his opinion in the matter,—he may trust the word of a much wiser man, who has assured us, That there is nothing better in this world, than that a man should eat and drink, and rejoice in his works, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour;—for that is his portion.

To rescue him from this brutal experiment, Ambition takes him by the hand, and carries him into the world, shews him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them,—points out the many ways of advancing his fortune, and raising himself to honour;—lays before his eyes all the charms and bewitching temptations of

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power, and asks if there can be any happiness in this world like that of being caressed, courted, flattered, and followed?

To close all,—the philosopher meets him bustling in the full career of this pursuit,—stops him,—tells him, if he is in search of happiness, he is far gone out of his way;—that this deity has long been banished from noise and tumults, where there was no rest found for her, and was fled into solitude far from all commerce of the world: and, in a word, if he would find her, he must leave this busy and intriguing scene, and go back to that peaceful scene of retirement and books, from which he at first set out.

In this circle too often does man run, tries all experiments, and generally sits down weary and dissatisfied with them all at last,—in utter despair of ever accomplishing what he wants,—nor knowing what to trust to after so many disappointments,—or where to lay the fault, whether in the incapacity of his own nature, or the insufficiency of the enjoyments themselves.

In this uncertain and perplexed state,—without knowledge which way to turn or where to betake ourselves for refuge,—so often abused and deceived by the many who pretend thus to shew us any good,—Lord! says the Psalmist, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us! Send us some rays of thy grace and heavenly wisdom, in this benighted search after happiness, to direct us safely to it! O God! let us not wander for ever without a guide, in this dark region, in endless pursuit of our mistaken good, but enlighten our eyes that we sleep not in death;—open to them the comforts of thy holy word and religion;—lift up the light of thy countenance upon us,—and make us know the joy and satisfaction of living in the true faith and fear of thee, which only can carry us to this haven of

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rest where we would be,—that sure haven, where true joys are to be found, which will at length not only answer all our expectations,—but satisfy the most unbounded of our wishes for ever and ever.

The words thus opened, naturally reduce the remaining part of the discourse under two heads;—the first part of the verse,—'there be many that say, Who will 'shew us any good?'—to make some reflections upon the insufficiency of most of our enjoyments towards the attainment of happiness, upon some of the most-received plans on which 'tis generally sought.

The examination of which will lead us up to the source and true secret of all happiness, suggested to us in the latter part of the verse:—'Lord, lift thou up 'the light of thy countenance upon us!'—that there can be no real happiness without religion and virtue, and the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit to direct our lives in the true pursuit of it.

Let us inquire into the disappointments of human happiness, on some of the most-received plans on which 'tis generally sought for and expected by the bulk of mankind.

There is hardly any subject more exhausted, or which, at one time or other, has afforded more matter for argument and declamation, than this one, of the insufficiency of our enjoyments. Scarce a reformed sensualist, from Solomon down to our own days, who has not, in some fits of repentance or disappointment, uttered some sharp reflection upon the emptiness of human pleasure, and of the vanity of vanities which discovers itself in all the pursuits of mortal man.—But the mischief has been, that though so many good things have been said, they have generally had the fate to be considered either as the overflowings of disgust from sated appetites, which could no longer relish

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the pleasures of life; or, as the declamatory opinions of recluse and splenetic men, who had never tasted them at all, and, consequently, were thought no judges of the matter. So that 'tis no great wonder, if the greatest part of such reflections, however just in themselves and founded on truth and a knowledge of the world, are found to leave little impression where the imagination was already heated with great expectations of future happiness; and that the best lectures that have been read upon the vanity of the world, so seldom stop a man in the pursuit of the object of his desire, or give him half the conviction that the possession of it will, and what the experience of his own life, or a careful observation upon the life of others, do at length generally confirm to us all.

Let us endeavour then to try the cause upon this issue; and, instead of recurring to the common arguments, or taking any one's word in the case, let us trust to matter of fact; and if, upon enquiry, it appears that the actions of mankind are not to be accounted for upon any other principle but this of the insufficiency of our enjoyments, 'twill go further towards the establishment of the truth of this part of the discourse, than a thousand speculative arguments which might be offered upon the occasion.

Now, if we take a survey of the life of man, from the time he is come to reason, to the latest decline of it in old age,—we shall find him engaged, and generally hurried on in such a succession of different pursuits, and different opinions of things, through the different stages of his life,—as will admit of no explication but this,—That he finds no rest for the sole of his foot, on any of the plans where he has been led to expect it.

The moment he is got loose from tutors and governors, and is left to judge for himself, and pursue

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this scheme his own way,—his first thoughts are generally full of the mighty happiness which he is going to enter upon, from the free enjoyment of the pleasures in which he sees others of his age and fortune engaged.

In consequence of this,—take notice how his imagination is caught by every glittering appearance that flatters this expectation.—Observe what impressions are made upon his senses by diversions, music, dress, and beauty,—and how his spirits are upon the wing, flying in pursuit of them, that you would think he could never have enough.

Leave him to himself a few years, till the edge of appetite is worn down,—and you will scarce know him again. You will find him entered into engagements, and setting up for a man of business and conduct, talking of no other happiness but what centers in projects of making the most of this world, and providing for his children and children's children after them. Examine his notions, he will tell you, that the gayer pleasures of youth are only fit for those who know not how to dispose of themselves and time to better advantage;—that however fair and promising they might appear to a man unpractised in them,—they were no better than a life of folly and impertinence; and, so far from answering your expectations of happiness, 'twas well if you escaped without pain:—that, in every experiment he had tried, he had found more bitter than sweet; and, for the little pleasure one could snatch,—it too often left a terrible sting behind it: besides, did the balance lay on the other side, he would tell you there could be no true satisfaction where a life runs on in so giddy a circle, out of which a wise man should extricate himself as soon as he can, that he may begin to look forwards:—that

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it becomes a man of character and consequence to lay aside childish things, to take care of his interests, to establish the fortune of his family, and place it out of want and dependence; and, in a word, if there is such a thing as happiness upon earth, it must consist in the accomplishment of this:—and, for his own part, if God should prosper his endeavours so as to be worth such a sum, or to be able to bring such a point to bear,—he shall be one of the happiest of the sons of men.—In full assurance of this, on he drudges,—plots,—contrives,—rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, till at length, by hard labour and perseverance, he has reached, if not outgone, the object he had first in view.—When he got thus far,—if he is a plain and sincere man, he will make no scruple to acknowledge truly what alteration he has found in himself.—If you ask him,—he will tell you, that his imagination painted something before his eyes, the reality of which he has not yet attained to: that, with all the accumulation of his wealth, he neither lives the merrier, sleeps the sounder, nor has less care and anxiety upon his spirits than at his first setting out.

Perhaps, you'll say, some dignity, honour, or title, only is wanting:—Oh! could I accomplish that, as there would be nothing left then for me to wish, good God! how happy should I be! 'Tis still the same;—the dignity or title,—though they crown his head with honour,—add not one cubit to his happiness.—Upon summing up the account, all, all is found to be seated merely in the imagination.—The faster he has pursued, the faster the phantom flies before him;—and, to use the satirist's comparison of the chariot-wheels,—haste as they will, they must for ever keep the same distance.

But what? though I have been thus far disappointed

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in my expectations of happiness from the possession of riches,—'Let me try whether I shall not meet 'with it in the spending and fashionable enjoyment 'of them.'

Behold! I will get me down, and make me great works, and build me houses, and plant me vineyards, and make me gardens and pools of water; and I will get me servants and maidens; and whatsoever my eyes desire, I will not keep from them.

In prosecution of this,—he drops all painful pursuits,—withdraws himself from the busy part of the world,—realizes,—pulls down,—builds up again;—buys statues, pictures,—plants,—and plucks up by the roots,—levels mountains—and fills up valleys,—turns rivers into dry ground, and dry ground into rivers;—says unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and unto another, Do this, and he doeth it;—and whatever his soul lusteth after of this kind, he withholds not from it. When every thing is thus planned by himself, and executed according to his wish and direction, surely he is arrived to the accomplishment of his wishes, and has got to the summit of all human happiness?—Let the most fortunate adventurers in this way answer the question for him, and say,—how often it arises higher than a bare and simple amusement,—and well, if you can compound for that,—since 'tis often purchased at so high a price, and so soured by a mixture of other incidental vexations, as to become too often a work of repentance, which, in the end, will extort the same sorrowful confession from him, which it did from Solomon in the like case,—'Lo! I looked on all the 'works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour 'that I had laboured to do,—and behold all was vanity 'and vexation of spirit,—and there was no profit to 'me under the sun.'

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To inflame this account the more,—it would be no miracle if, upon casting it up, he has gone farther lengths than he first intended, run into expenses which have entangled his fortune, and brought himself into such difficulties as to make way for the last experiment he can try,—and that is, to turn miser, with no happiness in view but what is to rise out of the little designs of a sordid mind, set upon saving and scraping up all he has injudiciously spent.

In this last stage,—behold him a poor trembling wretch, shut up from all mankind, sinking into utter contempt; spending careful days and sleepless nights in pursuit of what a narrow and contracted heart can never enjoy:—and let us here leave him to the conviction he will one day find,—that there is no end of his labour, — that his eyes will never be satisfied with riches, or will say,—For whom do I labour and bereave myself of rest?—This is also a sore travail.

I believe this is no uncommon picture of the disappointments of human life,—and the manner our pleasures and enjoyments slip from under us in every stage of our life. And though I would not be thought by it as if I was denying the reality of pleasures, or disputing the being of them, any more than one would the reality of pain,—yet I must observe on this head, that there is a plain distinction to be made betwixt pleasure and happiness; for, though there can be no happiness without pleasure,—yet the reverse of the proposition will not hold true.—We are so made, that, from the common gratifications of our appetites, and the impressions of a thousand objects, we snatch the one, like a transient gleam, without being suffered to taste the other, and enjoy the perpetual sunshine and fair weather which constantly attend it. This, I con-

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tend, is only to be found in religion,—in the consciousness of virtue,—and the sure and certain hopes of a better life, which brightens all our prospects, and leaves no room to dread disappointments,—because the expectation of it is built upon a rock, whose foundations are as deep as those of heaven and hell.

And though, in our pilgrimage through this world, —some of us may be so fortunate as to meet with some clear fountains by the way that may cool, for a few moments, the heat of this great thirst of happiness,—yet our Saviour, who knew the world, though he enjoyed but little of it, tells us, that whosoever drinketh of this water will thirst again:—and we all find by experience, it is so, and, by reason, that it always must be so.

I conclude with a short observation upon Solomon's evidence in this case.

Never did the busy brain of a lean and hectic chemist search for the philosopher's stone with more pains and ardour than this great man did after happiness. He was one of the wisest inquirers into Nature;—had tried all her powers and capacities; and after a thousand vain speculations and vile experiments, he affirmed, at length, it lay hid in no one thing he had tried. Like the chemist's projections, all had ended in smoke, or, what was worse, in vanity and vexation of spirit.—The conclusion of the whole matter was this,—That he advises every man who would be happy, to fear God and keep his commandments.

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SERMON II.

THE HOUSE OF FEASTING AND THE HOUSE OF MOURNING DESCRIBED.

ECCLES. vii. 2, 3.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.

THAT I deny;—but let us hear the wise man's reasoning upon it,—'for that *is* the end of all men, and the 'living *will* lay it to *his* heart: sorrow is better than 'laughter:'—for a crack-brain'd order of Carthusian monks, I grant, but not for men of the world. For what purpose, do you imagine, has God made us? for the social sweets of the well-watered valleys, where he has planted us, or for the dry and dismal desert of a Sierra Morena? Are the sad accidents of life, and the uncheery hours which perpetually overtake us, are they not enough, but we must sally forth in quest of them,—belie our own hearts, and say, as our text would have us, that they are better than those of joy? Did the Best of Beings send us into the world for this end,—to go weeping through it,—to vex and shorten a life short and vexatious enough already? Do you think, my good preacher, that he who is infinitely happy, can envy us our enjoyments? or that a Being so infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful traveller the short rest and refreshments necessary to support his spirits through the stages of a weary pilgrimage? or that he would call him to a severe reckoning, because in his way he had hastily snatched at some little fugacious pleasures, merely to sweeten this uneasy journey

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of life, and reconcile him to the ruggedness of the road, and the many hard jostlings he is sure to meet with? Consider, I beseech you, what provision and accommodation the Author of our being has prepared for us, that we might not go on our way sorrowing—how many caravanserais of rest—what powers and faculties he has given us for taking it—what apt objects he has placed in our way to entertain us;—some of which he has made so fair, so exquisitely fitted for this end, that they have power over us for a time to charm away the sense of pain, to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and sickness, and make it go and remember its miseries no more.

I will not contend at present against this rhetoric; I would chuse rather for a moment to go on with the allegory, and say we are travellers, and, in the most affecting sense of that idea, that, like travellers, though upon business of the last and nearest concern to us, we may surely be allowed to amuse ourselves with the natural or artificial beauties of the country we are passing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand we are sent upon; and if we can so order it, as not to be led out of the way, by the variety of prospects, edifices, and ruins which solicit us, it would be a nonsensical piece of saint-errantry to shut our eyes.

But let us not lose sight of the argument, in pursuit of the simile.

Let us remember, various as our excursions are—that we have still set our faces towards Jerusalem;—that we have a place of rest and happiness, towards which we hasten; and that the way to get there, is not so much to please our hearts, as to improve them in virtue:—that mirth and feasting are usually no friends to achievements of this kind,—but that a season of

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affliction is in some sort a season of piety—not only because our sufferings are apt to put us in mind of our sins, but that by the check and interruption which they give to our pursuits, they allow us what the hurry and bustle of the world too often deny us,—and that is, a little time for reflection, which is all that most of us want to make us wiser and better men;—that at certain times it is so necessary a man's mind should be turned towards itself, that rather than want occasions, he had better purchase them at the expense of his present happiness:—he had better, as the text expresses it, *go to the house of mourning*, where he will meet with something to subdue his passions, than to the house of feasting, where the joy and gaiety of the place is likely to excite them: That whereas the entertainments and caresses of the one place expose his heart and lay it open to temptations,—the sorrows of the other defend it, and as naturally shut them from it. So strange and unaccountable a creature is man! he is so framed, that he cannot but pursue happiness;—and yet, unless he is made sometimes miserable, how apt he is to mistake the way which can only lead him to the accomplishment of his own wishes!

This is the full force of the wise man's declaration. —But to do further justice to his words, I will endeavour to bring the subject still nearer.—For which purpose, it will be necessary to stop here, and take a transient view of the two places here referred to,—the house of mourning, and the house of feasting. Give me leave, therefore, I beseech you, to recall both of them for a moment to your imaginations, that from thence I may appeal to your hearts, how faithfully, and upon what good grounds, the effects and natural operations of each upon our minds are intimated in the text.

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And first, let us look into the house of feasting. And here, to be as fair and candid as possible in the description of this, we will not take it from the worst originals, such as are opened merely for the sale of virtue, and so calculated for the end, that the disguise each is under not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but safely to carry it into execution too.

This we will not suppose to be the case;—nor let us even imagine the house of feasting to be such a scene of intemperance and excess as the house of feasting does often exhibit; but let us take it from one as little exceptionable as we can,—where there is, or at least appears, nothing really criminal,—but where every thing seems to be kept within the visible bounds of moderation and sobriety.

Imagine then such a house of feasting, where, either by consent or invitation, a number of each sex is drawn together, for no other purpose but the enjoyment and mutual entertainment of each other, which we will suppose shall arise from no other pleasures but what custom authorises, and religion does not absolutely forbid.

Before we enter,——let us examine what must be the sentiments of each individual previous to his arrival; and we shall find, that however they may differ from one another in tempers and opinions, that every one seems to agree in this—that as he is going to a house dedicated to joy and mirth, it was fit he should divest himself of whatever was likely to contradict that intention, or be inconsistent with it:—That for this purpose, he had left his cares—his serious thoughts—and his moral reflections behind him, and was come forth from home with only such dispositions and gaiety of heart as suited the occasion, and promoted the intended mirth and jollity of the place.

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With this preparation of mind, which is as little as can be supposed, since it will amount to no more than a desire in each to render himself an acceptable guest, —let us conceive them entering into the house of feasting, with hearts set loose from grave restraints, and open to the expectations of receiving pleasure. It is not necessary, as I premised, to bring intemperance into this scene—or to suppose such an excess in the gratification of the appetites, as shall ferment the blood and set the desires in a flame:—Let us admit no more of it, therefore, than will gently stir them, and fit them for the impressions which so benevolent a commerce will naturally excite. In this disposition, thus wrought upon beforehand, and already improved to this purpose,—take notice how mechanically the thoughts and spirits rise,—how soon and insensibly they are got above the pitch and first bounds which cooler hours would have marked.

When the gay and smiling aspect of things has begun to leave the passages to a man's heart thus thoughtlessly unguarded,—when kind and caressing looks of every object without, that can flatter his senses, have conspired with the enemy within, to betray him, and put him off his defence,—when music likewise hath lent her aid, and tried her power upon the passions,—when the voice of singing men, and the voice of singing women, with the sound of the viol and the lute, have broke in upon his soul, and in some tender notes have touched the secret springs of rapture,—that moment let us dissect and look into his heart,—see how vain! how weak! how empty a thing it is! Look through its several recesses,—those pure mansions formed for the reception of innocence and virtue:—sad spectacle! Behold those fair inhabitants now dispossessed—turned out of their

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sacred dwellings, to make room—for what?—at the best for levity and indiscretion—perhaps for folly,—it may be for more impure guests, which possibly, in so general a riot of the mind and senses, may take occasion to enter unsuspected at the same time.

In a scene and disposition thus described—can the most cautious say—Thus far shall my desires go—and no farther? or will the coolest and most circumspect say, when pleasure has taken full possession of his heart, that no thought nor purpose shall arise there, which he would have concealed? In those loose and unguarded moments the imagination is not always at command;—in spite of reason and reflection, it will forcibly carry him sometimes whither he would not,—like the unclean spirit, in the parent's sad description of his child's case, which took him, and oft-times cast him into the fire to destroy him; and wheresoever it taketh him, it teareth him, and hardly departeth from him.

But this, you'll say, is the worst account of what the mind may suffer here.

Why may we not make more favourable suppositions?——that numbers, by exercise and custom to such encounters, learn gradually to despise and triumph over them;—that the minds of many are not so susceptible of warm impressions, or so badly fortified against them, that pleasure should easily corrupt or soften them;—that it would be hard to suppose, of the great multitudes which daily throng and press into this house of feasting, but that numbers come out of it again, with all the innocence with which they entered;—and that if both sexes are included in the computation, what *fair* examples shall we see of many of so pure and chaste a turn of mind—that the house of feasting, with all its charms and

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temptations, was never able to excite a thought, or awaken an inclination, which virtue need to blush at—or which the most scrupulous conscience might not support. God forbid we should say otherwise! —No doubt, numbers of all ages escape unhurt, and get off this dangerous sea without shipwreck. Yet are they not to be reckoned amongst the more fortunate adventurers;—and though one would not absolutely prohibit the attempt, or be so cynical as to condemn every one who tries it, since there are so many, I suppose, who cannot well do otherwise, and whose condition and situation in life unavoidably force them upon it,—yet we may be allowed to describe this fair and flattering coast,—we may point out the unsuspected dangers of it, and warn the unwary passenger where they lie: we may shew him what hazards his youth and inexperience will run, how little he can gain by the venture, and how much wiser and better it would be (as is implied in the text) to seek occasions rather to improve his little stock of virtue, than incautiously expose it to so unequal a chance, where the best he can hope is to return safe with what treasure he carried out,—but where, probably, he may be so unfortunate as to lose it all,—be lost himself,—and undone for ever.

Thus much for the house of feasting; which, by the way, though generally open at other times of the year throughout the world, is supposed, in Christian countries, now every where to be universally shut up. And, in truth, I have been more full in my cautions against it, not only as reason requires,—but in reverence to this season,* wherein our Church exacts a more particular forbearance and self-denial in this

* Preached in *Lent.*

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point, and thereby adds to the restraints upon pleasure and entertainments which this representation of things has suggested against them already.

Here, then, let us turn aside from this gay scene; —and suffer me to take you with me for a moment to one much fitter for your meditation. Let us go into the house of mourning, made so by such afflictions as have been brought in merely by the common cross accidents and disasters to which our condition is exposed—where, perhaps, the aged parents sit broken-hearted, pierced to their souls with the folly and indiscretion of a thankless child—the child of their prayers, in whom all their hopes and expectations centered.—Perhaps a more affecting scene: A virtuous family lying pinched with want, where the unfortunate support of it, having long struggled with a train of misfortunes, and bravely fought up against them,—is now piteously borne down at the last—overwhelmed with a cruel blow which no forecast or frugality could have prevented.—O GOD, look upon his afflictions!—Behold him distracted with many sorrows, surrounded with the tender pledges of his love, and the partner of his cares—without bread to give them; unable, from the remembrance of better days, to dig,—to beg, ashamed.

When we enter into the house of mourning such as this—it is impossible to insult the unfortunate, even with an improper look.—Under whatever levity and dissipation of heart such objects catch our eyes,—they catch likewise our attentions, collect and call home our scattered thoughts, and exercise them with wisdom. A transient scene of distress, such as is here sketched, how soon does it furnish materials to set the mind at work! how necessarily does it engage it to the consideration of the miseries and misfortunes, the dangers and calamities, to which the life of man is subject!

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By holding up such a glass before it, it forces the mind to see and reflect upon the vanity—the perishing condition and uncertain tenure of every thing in this world. From reflections of this serious cast, how insensibly do the thoughts carry us farther!—and, from considering what we are—what kind of world we live in, and what evils befall us in it, how naturally do they set us to look forwards at what possibly we shall be;—for what kind of world we are intended—what evils may befall us there—and what provision we should make against them here, whilst we have time and opportunity!

If these lessons are so inseparable from the house of mourning here supposed,—we shall find it a still more instructive school of wisdom when we take a view of the place in that more affecting light in which the wise man seems to confine it in the text: in which, by the house of mourning, I believe, he means that particular scene of sorrow, where there is lamentation and mourning for the dead.

Turn in hither, I beseech you, for a moment. Behold a dead man ready to be carried out, the only son of his mother, and she a widow! Perhaps a more affecting spectacle: A kind and indulgent father of a numerous family lies breathless——snatched away in the strength of his age——torn in an evil hour from his children, and the bosom of a disconsolate wife!

Behold much people of the city gathered together to mix their tears, with settled sorrow in their looks, going heavily along to the house of mourning, to perform that last melancholy office, which, when the debt of nature is paid, we are called upon to pay to each other!

If this sad occasion which leads him there has not done it already, take notice, to what a serious and

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devout frame of mind every man is reduced, the moment he enters this gate of affliction. The busy and fluttering spirits, which in the house of mirth were wont to transport him from one diverting object to another — see how they are fallen! how peaceably they are laid! In this gloomy mansion, full of shades and uncomfortable damps to seize the soul—see, the light and easy heart, which never knew what it was to think before, how pensive it is now! how soft, how susceptible, how full of religious impressions, how deeply it is smitten with sense and with a love of virtue! Could we, in this crisis, whilst this empire of reason and religion lasts, and the heart is thus exercised with wisdom and busied with heavenly contemplations—could we see it naked as it is—stripped of its passions, unspotted by the world, and regardless of its pleasures —we might then safely rest our cause upon this single evidence, and appeal to the most sensual, whether Solomon has not made a just determination here, in favour of the house of mourning?—not for its own sake, but as it is fruitful in virtue, and becomes the occasion of so much good. Without this end, sorrow, I own, has no use but to shorten a man's days;—nor can gravity, with all its studied solemnity of look and carriage, serve any end but to make one half of the world merry, and impose upon the other.

Consider what has been said, and may God of his mercy bless you! Amen.

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SERMON III.

PHILANTHROPY RECOMMENDED.

LUKE, x. 36, 37.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?—And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him,—Go, and do thou likewise.

In the foregoing verses of this chapter, the Evangelist relates that a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Jesus, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?—To which enquiry our Saviour, as his manner was, when any ensnaring question was put to him, which he saw proceeded more from a design to entangle him than an honest view of getting information—instead of giving a direct answer which might afford a handle to malice, or at best serve only to gratify an impertinent humour,—he immediately retorts the question upon the man who asked it, and unavoidably puts him upon the necessity of answering himself;—and, as in the present case, the particular profession of the enquirer, and his supposed general knowledge of all other branches of learning, left no room to suspect he could be ignorant of the true answer to this question,—and especially of what every one knew was delivered upon that head by their great Legislator,—our Saviour therefore refers him to his own memory of what he had found there in the course of his studies:—What is written in the law, how readest thou?—Upon which the inquirer, reciting the general heads of our duty to God and man, as delivered in the 18th of Leviticus

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and the 6th of Deuteronomy,—namely,—*That we should worship the Lord our God with all our hearts, and love our neighbour as ourselves;* our blessed Saviour tells him, he had answered right, and if he followed that lesson, could not fail of the blessing he seemed desirous to inherit:—*This do, and thou shalt live.*

But he, as the context tells us, willing to justify himself—willing possibly to gain more credit in the conference, or hoping perhaps to hear such a partial and narrow definition of the word *neighbour* as would suit his own principles, and justify some particular oppressions of his own, or those of which his whole order lay under an accusation—says unto Jesus, in the 29th verse,—*And who is my neighbour?* Though the demand at first sight may seem utterly trifling, yet was it far from being so in fact: for, according as you understood the term in a more or less restrained sense —it produced many necessary variations in the duties you owed from that relation.—Our blessed Saviour, to rectify any partial and pernicious mistake in this matter, and to place at once this duty of the love of our neighbour upon its true bottom of philanthropy and universal kindness, makes answer to the proposed question, not by any far-fetched refinement from the schools of the Rabbies, which might have sooner silenced than convinced the man,—but by a direct appeal to human nature, in an instance he relates of a man falling among thieves, left in the greatest distress imaginable, till by chance a Samaritan, an utter stranger, coming where he was, by an act of great goodness and compassion, not only relieved him at present, but took him under his protection, and generously provided for his future safety.

On the close of which engaging account——our Saviour appeals to the man's own heart, in the first

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verse of the text:—*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?*—and instead of drawing the inference himself, leaves him to decide in favour of so noble a principle, so evidently founded on mercy.—The lawyer, struck with the truth and justice of the doctrine, and frankly acknowledging the force of it, our blessed Saviour concludes the debate with a short admonition, that he would practice what he had approved,—and go, and imitate that fair example of universal benevolence which it had set before him.

In the remaining part of the discourse I shall follow the same plan; and therefore shall beg leave to enlarge first upon the story itself, with such reflections as will arise from it; and conclude, as our Saviour has done, with the same exhortation to kindness and humanity which so naturally falls from it.

A certain man, says our Saviour, went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and departed, leaving him half-dead.—There is something in our nature which engages us to take part in every accident to which man is subject, from what cause soever it may have happened; but in such calamities as a man has fallen into through mere misfortune, to be charged upon no fault or indiscretion of himself, there is something then so truly interesting, that at the first sight we generally make them our own, not altogether from a reflection that they might have been or may be so, but oftener from a certain generosity and tenderness of nature which disposes us for compassion, abstracted from all considerations of self: so that, without any observable act of the will, we suffer with the unfortunate, and feel a weight upon our spirits we know not why, on seeing the most common instances of their distress. But

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where the spectacle is uncommonly tragical, and complicated with many circumstances of misery, the mind is then taken captive at once, and, *were* it inclined to it, has no power to make resistance, but surrenders itself to all the tender emotions of pity and deep concern. So that when one considers this friendly part of our nature without looking farther, one would think it impossible for a man to look upon misery without finding himself in some measure attached to the interest of him who suffers it.—I say, one would think it impossible,—for there are some tempers—(how shall I describe them?)—formed either of such impenetrable matter, or wrought up by habitual selfishness to such an utter insensibility of what becomes of the fortunes of their fellow-creatures, as if they were not partakers of the same nature, or had no lot or connection at all with the species.

Of this character, our Saviour produces two disgraceful instances in the behaviour of a Priest and a Levite, whom in this account he represents as coming to the place where the unhappy man was;—both passing by without either stretching forth a hand to assist, or uttering a word to comfort him in his distress.

And by chance there came down a certain priest!—Merciful God! that a teacher of thy religion should ever want humanity!—or that a man, whose head might be thought full of the one, should have a heart void of the other!—This however was the case before us;—and though in theory one would scarce suspect that the least pretence to religion, and an open disregard to so main a part of it, could ever meet together in one person,—yet, in fact, it is no fictitious character.

Look into the world.—How often do you behold a sordid wretch, whose strait heart is open to no man's affliction, taking shelter behind an appearance of piety,

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and putting on the garb of religion, which none but the merciful and compassionate have a title to wear! Take notice, with what sanctity he goes to the end of his days, in the same selfish track in which he at first set out,—turning neither to the right hand nor to the left,—but plods on;—pores all his life long upon the ground, as if afraid to look up, lest, peradventure, he should see aught which might turn him one moment out of that straight line where interest is carrying him; or if, by chance, he stumbles upon a hapless object of distress, which threatens such a disaster to him,—like the man here represented, *devoutly* passing by on the other side, as if unwilling to trust himself to the impressions of nature, or hazard the inconveniences which pity might lead him into upon the occasion.

There is but one stroke wanting in this picture of an unmerciful man, to render the character utterly odious; and that our Saviour gives in the following instance he relates upon it. And likewise, says he, 'a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked 'at him.' It was not a transient oversight, the hasty or ill-advised neglect of an unconsidering humour, with which the best disposed are sometimes overtaken, and led on beyond the point where otherwise they would have wished to stop.—No! on the contrary, it had all the aggravation of a deliberate act of insensibility proceeding from a hard heart. When he was at the place, he came and looked at him,—considered his misfortunes, gave time for reason and nature to have awoke,—saw the imminent danger he was in,—and the pressing necessity of immediate help, which so violent a case called aloud for; and after all,—turned aside, and unmercifully left him to all the distresses of his condition.

In all unmerciful actions, the worst of men pay this

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compliment at least to humanity, as to endeavour to wear as much of the appearance of it as the case will well let them;—so that, in the hardest acts a man shall be guilty of, he has some motives, true or false, always ready to offer, either to satisfy himself or the world,—and, God knows, too often to impose upon both the one and the other. And therefore it would be no hard matter here to give a probable guess at what passed in the Levite's mind in the present case, and shew, was it necessary, by what kind of casuistry he settled the matter with his conscience as he passed by, and guarded all the passages to his heart against the inroads which pity might attempt to make upon the occasion.—But it is painful to dwell long upon this disagreeable part of the story; I therefore hasten to the concluding incident of it, which is so amiable, that one cannot easily be too copious in reflections upon it. —And behold, says our Saviour, a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,—and went to him,—bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine,—set him upon his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.—I suppose, it will be scarce necessary here to remind you, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans;—an old religious grudge,—the worst of all grudges,—had wrought such a dislike between both people that they held themselves mutually discharged not only from all offices of friendship and kindness, but even from the most common acts of courtesy and good manners. This operated so strongly in our Saviour's time, that the woman of Samaria seemed astonished that he, being a Jew, should ask water of her, who was a Samaritan;—so that, with such a prepossession, however distressful the case of the unfortunate man was,

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and how reasonably soever he might plead for pity from another man, there was little aid or consolation to be looked for from so unpromising a quarter. 'Alas! 'after I have been twice passed by, neglected by men 'of my own nation and religion, bound by so many 'ties to assist me; left here friendless and unpitied 'both by a Priest and a Levite, men whose profession 'and superior advantages of knowledge could not 'leave them in the dark in what manner they should 'discharge this debt which my condition claims,— 'after this,—what hopes? what expectations from a 'passenger, not only a stranger,—but a Samaritan, 'released from all obligations to me, and, by a 'national dislike, inflamed by mutual ill offices, now 'made my enemy, and more likely to rejoice at the 'evils which have fallen upon me, than to stretch 'forth a hand to save me from them!'

'Tis no unnatural soliloquy to imagine; but the actions of generous and compassionate tempers baffle all little reasonings about them.—True charity, in the Apostle's description, as it is kind, and is not easily provoked, so it manifested this character here; for we find, when he came where he was, and beheld his distress,—all the unfriendly passions, which at another time might have rose within him, now utterly forsook him and fled: when he saw his misfortunes,—he forgot his enmity towards the man,—dropped all the prejudices which education had planted against him; and in the room of them, all that was good and compassionate was suffered to speak in his behalf.

In benevolent natures the impulse to pity is so sudden, that, like instruments of music which obey the touch, the objects which are fitted to excite such impressions work so instantaneous an effect, that you would think the will was scarce concerned, and that

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the mind was altogether passive in the sympathy which her own goodness has excited. The truth is,—the soul is generally in such cases so busily taken up, and wholly engrossed by the object of pity, that she does not attend to her own operations, or take leisure to examine the principles upon which she acts. So that the Samaritan, though the moment he saw him he had compassion on him, yet, sudden as the emotion is represented, you are not to imagine that it was mechanical, but that there was a settled principle of humanity and goodness which operated within him, and influenced not only the first impulse of kindness, but the continuation of it throughout the rest of so engaging a behaviour. And because it is a pleasure to look into a good mind, and trace out, as far as one is able, what passes within it on such occasions, I shall beg leave for a moment to state an account of what was likely to pass in his, and in what manner so distressful a case would necessarily work upon such a disposition.

As he approached the place where the unfortunate man lay, the instant he beheld him, no doubt some such train of reflections as these would rise in his mind:—'Good God! what a spectacle of misery do I 'behold!—a man stripped of his raiment,—wounded, '—lying languishing before me upon the ground, just 'ready to expire,—without the comfort of a friend to 'support him in his last agonies, or the prospect of a 'hand to close his eyes when his pains are over! But 'perhaps my concern should lessen when I reflect on 'the relations in which we stand to each other,—that 'he is a Jew, and I a Samaritan.—But are we not still 'both men? partakers of the same nature,—and sub-'ject to the same evils?—Let me change conditions 'with him for a moment, and consider, had his lot

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'befallen me as I journeyed in the way, what measure
'I should have expected at his hand.—Should I wish,
'when he beheld me wounded and half-dead, that he
'should shut up his bowels of compassion from me,
'and double the weight of my miseries by passing by
'and leaving them unpitied?—But I am a stranger to
'the man;—be it so;—but I am no stranger to his
'condition;—misfortunes are of no particular tribe or
'nation, but belong to us all,—and have a general
'claim upon us, without distinction of climate, country,
'or religion. Besides, though I am a stranger,—'tis
'no fault of his that I do not know him, and therefore
'unequitable he should suffer by it:—Had I known
'him, possibly I should have had cause to love and
'pity him the more;—for aught I know, he is some
'one of uncommon merit, whose life is rendered still
'more precious, as the lives and happiness of others
'may be involved in it: perhaps at this instant that
'he lies here forsaken in all this misery, a whole virtu-
'ous family is joyfully looking for his return, and
'affectionately counting the hours of his delay! Oh!
'did they know what evil had befallen him,—how
'would they fly to succour him!—Let me then hasten
'to supply those tender offices of binding up his
'wounds, and carrying him to a place of safety;—
'or, if that assistance comes too late, I shall comfort
'him at least in his last hour;—and, if I can do no-
'thing else,—I shall soften his misfortunes by dropping
'a tear of pity over them!'

'Tis almost necessary to imagine the good Samaritan was influenced by some such thoughts as these, from the uncommon generosity of his behaviour, which is represented by our Saviour operating like the warm zeal of a brother, mixed with the affectionate discretion and care of a parent, who was not satisfied with taking

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him under his protection, and supplying his present wants, but in looking forwards for him, and taking care that his wants should be supplied when he should be gone, and no longer near to befriend him.

I think there needs no stronger argument to prove how universally and deeply the seeds of this virtue of compassion are planted in the heart of man, than in the pleasure we take in such representations of it: and though some men have represented human nature in other colours (though to what end I know not), yet the matter of fact is so strong against them that from the general propensity to pity the unfortunate, we express that sensation by the word Humanity, as if it was inseparable from our nature. That it is not inseparable, I have allowed in the former part of this discourse, from some reproachful instances of selfish tempers, which seem to take part in nothing beyond themselves; yet I am persuaded, and affirm 'tis still so great and noble a part of our nature, that a man must do great violence to himself, and suffer many a painful conflict, before he has brought himself to a different disposition.

'Tis observable in the foregoing account, that when the Priest came to the place where he was, he passed by on the other side;—he might have passed by, you'll say, without turning aside.—No; there is a secret shame which attends every act of inhumanity, not to be conquered in the hardest natures; so that as in other cases, so especially in this, many a man will do a cruel act, who at the same time will blush to look you in the face, and is forced to turn aside before he can have a heart to execute his purpose.

Inconsistent creature that man is! who at that instant that he does what is wrong, is not able to withhold his testimony to what is good and praiseworthy!

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I have now done with the parable, which was the first thing proposed to be considered in this discourse; and should proceed to the second, which so naturally falls from it, of exhorting you, as our Saviour did the lawyer, upon it, to go and do so likewise; but I have been so copious in my reflections upon the story itself, that I find I have insensibly incorporated into them almost all that I should have said here in recommending so amiable an example; by which means I have unawares anticipated the task I proposed. I shall therefore detain you no longer than with a single remark upon the subject in general, which is this:—'Tis observable in many places of Scripture, that our blessed Saviour, in describing the day of judgment, does it in such a manner, as if the great enquiry then was to relate principally to this one virtue of compassion,—and as if our final sentence at that solemnity was to be pronounced exactly according to the degrees of it. 'I was a hungred, and ye gave me meat;—'thirsty, and ye gave me drink;—naked, and ye 'clothed me;—I was sick, and ye visited me;—in 'prison, and ye came unto me.' Not that we are to imagine from thence, as if any other good or evil action should then be overlooked by the eye of the All-seeing Judge, but barely to intimate to us, that a charitable and benevolent disposition is so principal and ruling a part of a man's character, as to be a considerable test by itself of the whole frame and temper of his mind, with which all other virtues and vices respectively rise and fall, and will almost necessarily be connected.—Tell me therefore of a compassionate man, you represent to me a man of a thousand other good qualities;—on whom I can depend,—whom I may safely trust with my wife,—my children,—my fortune, and reputation.—'Tis for this, as the Apostle

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argues from the same principle, — 'that he will not 'commit adultery,—that he will not kill,—that he will 'not steal,—that he will not bear false witness.' That is, the sorrows which are stirred up in men's hearts by such trespasses, are so tenderly felt by a compassionate man, that it is not in his power or his nature to commit them.

So that well might he conclude, that Charity, by which he means love to your neighbour, was the end of the commandment; and that whosoever fulfilled it, had fulfilled the law.

Now to God, &c. Amen.

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SERMON IV.

SELF KNOWLEDGE.

2 SAMUEL, xii. 7.

And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man: and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die, &c.

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SERMON IV.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

2 SAM. XII. 7.

And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man.

THERE is no historical passage in Scripture which gives a more remarkable instance of the deceitfulness of the heart of man to itself, and of how little we truly know of ourselves, than this, wherein David is convicted out of his own mouth, and is led by the prophet to condemn and pronounce a severe judgment upon another, for an act of injustice, which he had passed over in himself, and possibly reconciled to his own conscience. To know one's self, one would think, could be no very difficult lesson; for who, you'll say, can well be truly ignorant of himself, and the true disposition of his own heart? If a man thinks at all, he cannot be a stranger to what passes there;—he must be conscious of his own thoughts and desires; he must remember his past pursuits, and the true springs and motives which in general have directed the actions of his life: he may hang out false colours, and deceive the world; but how can a man deceive himself? That a man can, is evident, because he daily does so. Scripture tells us, and gives us many historical proofs of it, besides this to which the text refers;—'That 'the heart of man is treacherous to itself, and deceitful 'above all things:' and experience and every hour's commerce with the world confirms the truth of this

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seeming paradox, 'That though man is the only 'creature endowed with reflection, and consequently 'qualified to know the most of himself;—yet, so it 'happens, that he generally knows the least;—and 'with all the power which God has given him of 'turning his eyes inward upon himself, and taking 'notice of the chain of his own thoughts and desires, '—yet, in fact, is generally so inattentive, but always 'so partial an observer of what passes, that he is as 'much, nay often a much greater stranger to his own 'disposition and true character, than all the world 'besides!'

By what means he is brought under so manifest a delusion, and how he suffers himself to be so grossly imposed upon in a point which he is capable of knowing so much better than others, is not hard to give an account of, nor need we seek farther for it than amongst the causes which are every day perverting his reason and misleading him. We are decided in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors, and we suffer ourselves to see and reason just so far and no farther than they give us leave. How hard do we find it to pass an equitable and sound judgment in a matter where our interest is deeply concerned!—and even where there is the remotest consideration of SELF connected with the point before us, what a strange bias does it hang upon our minds, and how difficult is it to disengage our judgments entirely from it! With what reluctance are we brought to think evil of a friend whom we have long loved and esteemed! and though there happens to be strong appearances against him, how apt are we to overlook or put favourable constructions upon them, and even sometimes, when our zeal

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and friendship transport us, to assign the best and kindest motives for the worst and most unjustifiable parts of his conduct!

We are still worse casuists; and the deceit is proportionably stronger with a man, when he is going to judge of himself,—that dearest of all parties,—so closely connected with him,—so much and so long beloved,—of whom he has so early conceived the highest opinion and esteem, and with whose merit he has all along, no doubt, found so much reason to be contented. It is not an easy matter to be severe, where there is such an impulse to be kind,—or to efface at once all the tender impressions in favour of so old a friend, which disabled us from thinking of him as he is, and seeing him in the light, may be, in which every one else sees him.

So that, however easy this knowledge of one's self may appear at first sight, it is otherwise when we come to examine; since not only in practice, but even in speculation and theory, we find it one of the hardest and most painful lessons. Some of the earliest instructors of mankind, no doubt, found it so too; and for that reason soon saw the necessity of laying such a stress upon this great precept of self-knowledge, which, for its excellent wisdom and usefulness, many of them supposed to be a divine direction; that it came down from heaven, and comprehended the whole circle both of the knowledge and the duty of man. And indeed their zeal might easily be allowed in so high an encomium upon the attainment of a virtue, the want of which so often baffled their instructions, and rendered their endeavours of reforming the heart vain and useless. For who could think of a reformation of the faults without him, who knew not where they lay, or could set about correcting, till he had

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first come to a sense of the defects which required it?

But this was a point always much easier recommended by public instructors, than shewn how to be put in practice: and therefore others, who equally sought the reformation of mankind, observing that this direct road which led to it was guarded on all sides by self-love, and consequently very difficult to open access, soon found out that a different and more artful course was requisite: as they had not strength to remove this flattering passion which stood in their way and blocked up all the passages to the heart, they endeavoured by stratagem to get beyond it, and by a skilful address, if possible, to deceive it. This gave rise to the early manner of conveying their instructions in parables, fables, and such sort of indirect applications; which, though they could not conquer this principle of self-love, yet often laid it asleep, or at least over-reached it for a few moments, till a just judgment could be procured.

The prophet Nathan seems to have been a great master in this way of address. David had greatly displeased God by two grievous sins which he had committed; and the prophet's commission was to go and bring him to a conviction of them, and touch his heart with a sense of guilt for what he had done against the honour and life of Uriah.

The holy man knew, that was it any one's case but David's own, no man would have been so quick-sighted in discerning the nature of the injury,—more ready to have redressed it,—or who would have felt more compassion for the party who had suffered it, than he himself.

Instead therefore of declaring the real intention of his errand, by a direct accusation and reproof for the

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crimes he had committed, he comes to him with a fictitious complaint of a cruel act of injustice done by another; and accordingly he frames a case, not so parallel to David's as he supposed would awaken his suspicion, and prevent a patient and candid hearing; and yet not so void of resemblance in the main circumstances, as to fail of striking him when shewn in a proper light.

And Nathan came and said unto him, 'There were 'two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor; '—the rich man had exceeding many flocks and 'herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little 'ewe-lamb which he had bought and nourished up; '—and it grew up together with him and with his 'children;—it did eat of his own meat, and drink 'of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto 'him as a daughter:—and there came a traveller unto 'the rich man, and he spared to take of his own 'flock and of his own herd to dress for the wayfaring 'man that was come unto him, but took the poor 'man's lamb and dressed it for the man that was come 'unto him.'

The case was drawn up with great judgment and beauty;—the several minute circumstances which heightened the injury, truly affecting,—and so strongly urged, that it would have been impossible for any man with a previous sense of guilt upon his mind to have defended himself from some degree of remorse, which it must naturally have excited.

The story, though it spoke only of the injustice and oppressive act of another man,—yet it pointed to what he had lately done himself, with all the circumstances of its aggravation:—and withal, the whole was so tenderly addressed to the heart and passions, as to kindle at once the utmost horror and indignation.

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And so it did;—but not against the proper person. In his transport he forgot himself;—his anger greatly kindled at the man;—and he said unto Nathan, 'As 'the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing 'shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb four-'fold, because he did this thing, and because he had 'no pity.'

It can scarce be doubted here, but that David's anger was real, and that he was, what he appeared to be, greatly provoked and exasperated against the offender; and, indeed, his sentence against him proves he was so, above measure. For to punish the man with death, and oblige him to restore fourfold besides, was highly unequitable, and not only disproportioned to the offence, but far above the utmost rigour and severity of the law, which allowed a much softer atonement; requiring, in such a case, no more than an ample restitution and recompense in kind. The judgment, however, seems to have been truly sincere and well-meant, and bespoke rather the honest rashness of an unsuspicious judge, than the cool determination of a conscious and guilty man, who knew he was going to pass sentence upon himself.

I take notice of this particular, because it places this instance of self-deceit, which is the subject of the discourse, in the strongest light; and fully demonstrates the truth of a fact in this great man, which happens every day among ourselves, namely, that a man may be guilty of very bad and dishonest actions, and yet reflect so little, or so partially, upon what he has done, as to keep his conscience free, not only from guilt, but even the remotest suspicions, that he is the man which in truth he is, and what the tenor and evidence of his life demonstrate. If we look into the world,—David's is no uncommon case;—we see some one or

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other perpetually copying this bad original, sitting in judgment upon himself,—hearing his own cause, and not knowing what he is doing; hasty in passing sentence, and even executing it too with wrath upon the person of another; when, in the language of the prophet, one might say to him with justice,—'Thou art the 'man.'

Of the many revengeful, covetous, false, and ill-natured persons which we complain of in the world, though we all join in the cry against them, what man amongst us singles out himself as a criminal, or ever once takes it into his head that he adds to the number?—or where is there a man so bad, who would not think it the hardest and most unfair imputation, to have any of those particular vices laid to his charge?

If he has the symptoms ever so strong upon him, which he would pronounce infallible in another, they are indications of no such malady in himself.—He sees, what no one else sees, some secret and flattering circumstances in his favour, which no doubt make a wide difference betwixt his case and the party's which he condemns.

What other man speaks so often and vehemently against the vice of pride, sets the weakness of it in a more odious light, or is more hurt with it in another, than the proud man himself? It is the same with the passionate, the designing, the ambitious, and some other common characters in life; and being a consequence of the nature of such vices, and almost inseparable from them, the effects of it are generally so gross and absurd, that where pity does not forbid, it is pleasant to observe and trace the cheat through the several turnings and windings of the heart, and detect it through all the shapes and appearances which it puts on.

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Next to these instances of self-deceit and utter ignorance of our true disposition and character, which appear in not seeing *that* in ourselves which shocks us in another man, there is another species still more dangerous and delusive, and which the more guarded perpetually fall into from the judgments they make of different vices, according to their age and complexion, and the various ebbs and flows of their passions and desires.

To conceive this, let any man look into his own heart, and observe in how different a degree of detestation, numbers of actions stand there, though equally bad and vicious in themselves: he will soon find that such of them as strong inclination or custom has prompted him to commit, are generally dressed out, and painted with all the false beauties which a soft and flattering hand can give them; and that the others, to which he feels no propensity, appear at once naked and deformed, surrounded with all the true circumstances of their folly and dishonour.

When David surprised Saul sleeping in the cave, and cut off the skirt of his robe, we read, his heart smote him for what he had done:—strange, it smote him not in this matter of Uriah, where it had so much stronger reason to take the alarm!—A whole year had almost passed from the first commission of this injustice to the time the prophet was sent to reprove him; and we read not once of any remorse or compunction of heart for what he had done: and it is not to be doubted, had the same prophet met him when he was returning up out of the cave,—and told him, that, scrupulous and conscientious as he then seemed and thought himself to be, he was deceiving himself, and was capable of committing the foulest and most dishonourable actions;—that he should one day murder a

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faithful and valiant servant, whom he ought in justice to have loved and honoured;—that he should without pity first wound him in the tenderest part, by taking away his dearest possession,—and then unmercifully and treacherously rob him of his life:—had Nathan in a prophetic spirit foretold to David that he was capable of this, and that he should one day actually do it, and from no other motive but the momentary gratification of a base and unworthy passion, he would have received the prediction with horror, and said possibly with Hazael upon just such another occasion, and with the same ignorance of himself,—'What! is thy servant a 'dog, that he should do this great thing?' And yet in all likelihood, at that very time there wanted nothing but the same degree of temptation, and the same opportunity to induce him to the sin which afterwards overcame him.

Thus the case stands with us still. When the passions are warmed, and the sin which presents itself exactly tallies to the desire, observe how impetuously a man will rush into it, and act against all principles of honour, justice, and mercy! Talk to him the moment after upon the nature of another vice to which he is not addicted, and from which perhaps his age, his temper, or rank in life secure him; take notice, how well he reasons,—with what equity he determines,—what an honest indignation and sharpness he expresses against it, and how insensibly his anger kindles against the man who hath done this thing!

Thus we are nice in grains and scruples,—but knaves in matters of a pound weight; every day straining at gnats, yet swallowing camels;—miserably cheating ourselves, and torturing our reason to bring us in such a report of the sin as suits the present appetite and inclination.

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Most of us are aware of and pretend to detest the barefaced instances of that hypocrisy by which men deceive others; but few of us are upon our guard, or see that more fatal hypocrisy by which we deceive and over-reach our own hearts! It is a flattering and dangerous distemper, which has undone thousands:—we bring the seeds of it along with us into the world,—they insensibly grow up with us from our childhood,—they lie long concealed and undisturbed, and have generally got such deep root in our natures by the time we are come to years of understanding and reflection, that it requires all we have got to defend ourselves from their effects.

To make the case still worse on our sides, 'tis with this as with every grievous distemper of the body,—the remedies are dangerous and doubtful, in proportion to our mistakes and ignorance of the cause: for in the instances of self-deceit, though the head is sick, and the whole heart faint, the patient seldom knows what he ails. Of all the things we know and learn, this necessary knowledge comes to us the last.

Upon what principle it happens thus, I have endeavoured to lay open in the first part of this discourse; which I conclude with a serious exhortation to struggle against them; which we can only hope to do, by conversing more and oftener with ourselves, than the business and diversions of the world generally give us leave.

We have a chain of thoughts, desires, engagements, and idlenesses, which perpetually return upon us in their proper time and order:—let us, I beseech you, assign and set apart some small portion of the day for this purpose,—of retiring into ourselves, and searching into the dark corners and recesses of the heart, and taking notice of what is passing there. If a man can

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bring himself to do this task with a curious and impartial eye, he will quickly find the fruits of it will more than recompense his time and labour. He will see several irregularities and unsuspected passions within him which he never was aware of;—he will discover in his progress many secret turnings and windings in his heart to which he was a stranger, which now gradually open and disclose themselves to him upon a nearer view. In these labyrinths he will trace out such hidden springs and motives for many of his most applauded actions, as will make him rather sorry and ashamed of himself, than proud.

In a word, he will understand his errors, and then see the necessity, with David, of imploring God to cleanse him from his secret faults,—and with some hope and confidence to say, with this great man after his conviction,—'Try me, O God, and seek the ground 'of my heart;—prove me, and examine my thoughts; 'look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, '—and lead me in the way everlasting.'

Now to God the Father, &c. &c.

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SERMON V.

THE CASE OF ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH CONSIDERED.

A CHARITY SERMON.

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TO

THE VERY REVEREND

RICHARD OSBALDISTON, D.D.,

DEAN OF YORK.

SIR,

I HAVE taken the liberty to inscribe this Discourse to you, in testimony of the great respect which I owe to your character in general: and from a sense of what is due to it in particular, from every member of the *Church of York*.

I wish I had as good a reason for doing that, which has given me the opportunity of making so public and just an acknowledgment; being afraid there can be little left to be said upon the subject of *Charity*, which has not been often thought, and much better expressed by many who have gone before: and, indeed, it seems so beaten and common a path, that it is not an easy matter for a new-comer to distinguish himself in it, by any thing except the novelty of his *vehicle*.

I beg, however, Sir, your kind acceptance of it, and of the motives which have induced me to address it to you; one of which I cannot conceal in justice to myself, because it has proceeded from the sense of many favours and civilities which I have received from you.

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your most obliged,

and faithful humble Servant,

LAURENCE STERNE.

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SERMON V.

THE CASE OF ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH CONSIDERED.

1 KINGS, xvii. 16.

And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by the prophet Elijah.

THE words of the text are the record of a miracle wrought in behalf of the widow of Zarephath, who had charitably taken Elijah under her roof, and administered unto him in a time of great scarcity and distress. There is something very interesting and affectionate in the manner this story is related in Holy Writ; and, as it concludes with a second still more remarkable proof of God's favour to the same person, in the restoration of her dead son to life, one cannot but consider both miracles as rewards of that act of piety, wrought by Infinite Power, and left upon record in Scripture, not merely as testimonies of the Prophet's Divine Mission, but likewise as two encouraging instances of God Almighty's blessing upon works of charity and benevolence.

In this view I have made choice of this piece of sacred history, which I shall beg leave to make use of as the ground-work for an exhortation to charity in general; and, that it may better answer the particular purpose of this solemnity, I will endeavour to enlarge upon it with such reflections as, I trust in God, will excite some sentiments of compassion, which may be profitable to so pious a design.

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Elijah had fled from two dreadful evils—the approach of a famine, and the persecution of Ahab—an enraged enemy: and, in obedience to the command of God, had hid himself in the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. In this safe and peaceful solitude, blessed with daily marks of God's providence, the holy man dwelt, free both from the cares and glories of the world. By miraculous impulse, 'the ravens brought 'him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and 'flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook;' till, by continuance of drought (the windows of heaven being shut up in those days for three years and six months, which was the natural cause likewise of the famine) it came to pass, after a while, that the brook, the great fountain of his support, dried up; and he is again directed, by the word of the Lord, where to betake himself for shelter. He is commanded to arise and go to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, with an assurance that he had disposed the heart of a widow-woman there to sustain him.

The prophet follows the call of his God; the same hand which brought him to the gate of the city, had led also the poor widow out of her doors, oppressed with sorrow. She had come forth upon a melancholy errand, to make preparation to eat her last meal, and share it with her child.

No doubt, she had long fenced against this tragical event with all the thrifty management which self-preservation and parental love could inspire; full, no doubt, of cares and many tender apprehensions, lest the slender stock should fail them before the return of plenty.

But as she was a widow, having lost the only faithful friend who would best have assisted her in this virtuous struggle, the present necessity of the times at

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length overcame her, and she was just falling down an easy prey to it, when Elijah came to the place where she was.—'And he called unto her, and said, Fetch 'me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may 'drink. And, as she was going to fetch it, he called 'unto her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of 'bread in thine hand. And she said, as the Lord thy 'God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal 'in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I 'am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it 'for me and my son, that we may eat and die. And 'Elijah said unto her, Fear not, but go, and do as 'thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, 'and bring it unto me; and after, make for thee and 'for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the 'cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth 'rain upon the earth.'

True charity is always unwilling to find excuses,—else here was a fair opportunity of pleading many: she might have insisted over again upon her situation, which necessarily tied up her hands;—she might have urged the unreasonableness of the request,—that she was reduced to the lowest extremity already, and that it was contrary to justice and the first law of nature to rob herself and child of their last morsel, and give it to a stranger.

But, in generous spirits, compassion is sometimes more than a balance for self-preservation; for, as God certainly interwove that friendly softness in our nature to be a check upon too great a propensity towards self-love,—so it seemed to operate here.—For it is observable, that, though the prophet backed his request with the promise of an immediate recompense in multiplying her stock,—yet it is not evident she was influenced at

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all by that temptation; for, if she had, doubtless it must have wrought such a mixture of self-interest into the motive of her compliance, as must greatly have allayed the merit of the action. But this, I say, does not appear, but rather the contrary, from the reflection she makes upon the whole, in the last verse of the chapter: 'Now, by this I know that thou art a man of 'God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is 'truth.'

Besides, as she was an inhabitant of Zarephath (or, as it is called by St. Luke, Sarepta, subject to Zidon, the metropolis of Phœnicia, without the bounds of God's people), she had been brought up in gross darkness and idolatry, in utter ignorance of the Lord God of Israel; or, if she had heard of his name, which is all that seems probable, she had been taught to disbelieve the mighty wonders of his hand, and was still less likely to believe his prophet.

Moreover, she might argue, If this man, by some secret mystery of his own, or through the power of his God, is able to procure so preternatural a supply for me, whence comes it to pass that he now stands in want himself, oppressed both with hunger and thirst?

It appears, therefore, that she must have been wrought upon by an unmixed principle of humanity.—She looked upon him as a fellow-partner almost in the same affliction with herself;—she considered he had come a weary pilgrimage, in a sultry climate, through an exhausted country, where neither bread nor water were to be had but by acts of liberality;—that he had come too an unknown traveller; and, as a hard heart never wants a pretence, that this circumstance, which should rather have befriended, might have helped to oppress him.—She considered, for charity is ever fruitful in kind reasons, that he was now far from his own

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country, and had strayed out of the reach of the tender offices of some one who affectionately mourned his absence:—her heart was touched with pity;—she turned in silence, and 'went and did according as he 'had said. And behold, both she, and he, and her 'house, did eat many days;' or, as in the margin, one whole year. 'And the barrel of meal wasted not, 'neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the day that God 'sent rain upon the earth.'

Though it may not seem necessary to raise conjectures here upon this event, yet it is natural to suppose, the danger of the famine being thus unexpectedly got over, that the mother began to look hopefully forwards upon the rest of her days. There were many widows in Israel at that time, when the heavens were shut up for three years and six months, yet, as St. Luke observes, 'to none of them was the prophet sent, save to 'the widow of Sarepta.' In all likelihood, she would not be the last in making the same observation, and drawing from it some flattering conclusion in favour of her son.—Many a parent would build high upon a worse foundation.—'Since the God of Israel has thus 'sent his own messenger to us in our distress, to pass 'by so many houses of his own people, and to stop 'at mine, to save it in so miraculous a manner from 'destruction, doubtless, this is but an earnest of his 'future kind intentions to us: at least his goodness 'has decreed to comfort my old age by the long life 'and health of my son:—but, perhaps, he has some-'thing greater still in store for him; and I shall live 'to see the same hand hereafter crown his head with 'glory and honour.' We may naturally suppose her innocently carried away with such thoughts, when she is called back by an unexpected distemper, which surprises her son, and in one moment brings down all

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her hopes;—'for his sickness was so sore, that there 'was no breath left in him.'

The expostulations of immoderate grief are seldom just.—For, though Elijah had already preserved her son, as well as herself, from immediate death, and was the last cause to be suspected of so sad an accident, yet the passionate mother, in the first transport, challenges him as the author of her misfortune;—as if he had brought down sorrow upon a house which had so hospitably sheltered him. The prophet was too full of compassion to make reply to so unkind an accusation. He takes the dead child 'out of his mother's bosom, and laid him upon 'his own bed; and he cried unto the Lord, and 'said, O Lord my God, hast thou brought evil upon 'the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her 'son?'—'Is this the reward of all her charity and 'goodness? Thou hast before this robbed her of the 'dear partner of all her joys and all her cares; and 'now she is a widow, and has most reason to expect 'thy protection, behold thou hast withdrawn her last 'prop; thou hast taken away her child, the only 'stay she had to rest on.'—'And Elijah cried unto 'God, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let 'this child's soul come into him again!'

The prayer was urgent, and bespoke the distress of a humane mind deeply suffering in the misfortunes of another:—moreover, his heart was rent with other passions;—he was zealous for the name and honour of his God, and thought not only his omnipotence, but his glorious attribute of mercy concerned in the event: for O! with what triumph would the prophets of Baal retort his own bitter taunt, and say, 'his 'God was either talking, or he was pursuing, or was 'in a journey; or, peradventure, he slept, and should

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'have been awaked!'—He was moreover involved in the success of his prayer himself:—honest minds are most hurt by scandal;—and he was afraid lest so foul a one, so unworthy of his character, might arise among the heathen, who would report with pleasure, 'Lo! the widow of Zarephath took the 'messenger of the God of Israel under her roof, 'and kindly entertained him, and see how she is 'rewarded! surely the prophet was ungrateful; he 'wanted power, or, what is worse, he wanted pity.'

Besides all this, he pleaded not only the cause of the widow,—it was the cause of charity itself which had received a deep wound already, and would suffer still more, should God deny it this testimony of his favour. 'So the Lord hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; 'and the soul of the child came into him again, 'and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and 'brought him down out of the chamber into the 'house, and delivered him unto his mother; and 'Elijah said, See, thy son liveth!'

It would be a pleasure to a good mind to stop here a moment, and figure to itself the picture of so joyful an event;—to behold, on one hand, the raptures of the parent, overcome with surprise and gratitude:—and imagine how a sudden stroke of such impetuous joy must operate on a despairing countenance, long accustomed to sadness!—To conceive, on the other side of the *piece*, the holy man approaching with the child in his arms,—full of honest triumph in his looks, but sweetened with all the kind sympathy which a gentle nature could overflow with upon so happy an event! It is a subject one might recommend to the pencil of a great genius, and would even afford matter for description here, but that it would lead us too far from the

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particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of the story already; the chief design of which is to illustrate, by a fact, what is evident both in reason and scripture, that a charitable and good action is seldom cast away; but that, even in this life, it is more than probable, that what is so scattered shall be gathered again with increase. 'Cast thy 'bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after 'many days. Be as a father unto the fatherless, and 'instead of an husband unto their mother; so shalt 'thou be as a son of the Most High, and he will 'love thee more than thy mother doth. Be mindful 'of good turns, for thou knowest not what evil shall 'come upon the earth; and when thou fallest, thou 'shalt find a stay. It shall preserve thee from all 'affliction, and fight for thee against thy enemies 'better than a mighty shield and a strong spear.'

The great instability of temporal affairs, and constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, afford perpetual occasions of taking refuge in such a security.

What by successive misfortunes,—by failings and cross accidents in trade,—by miscarriage of projects;—what by unsuitable expenses of parents, extravagances of children, and the many other secret ways whereby riches make themselves wings and fly away,—so many surprising revolutions do every day happen in families, that it may not seem strange to say, that the posterity of some of the most liberal contributors here, in the changes which one century may produce, may possibly find shelter under this very plant which now they so kindly water.

Nay, so quickly sometimes has the wheel turned round, that many a man may live to enjoy the benefit of that charity which his own piety projected.

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But besides this, and exclusive of the right which God's promise gives to protection hereafter, charity and benevolence, in the ordinary chain of effects, have a natural and more immediate tendency in themselves to rescue a man from the accidents of the world, by softening the hearts, and winning every man's wishes to its interest. When a compassionate man falls, who would not pity him? who, that had power to do it, would not befriend and raise him up? or, could the most barbarous temper offer an insult to his distress without pain and reluctance? so that it is almost a wonder that covetousness, even in spite of itself, does not sometimes argue a man into charity, by its own principle of looking forwards, and the firm expectation it would delight in of receiving its own again with usury.—So evident is it, in the course of God's providence, and the natural stream of things, that a good office, one time or other, generally meets with a reward. ——Generally, did I say?—how can it ever fail?—when, besides all this, so large a share of the recompense is so inseparable, even from the action itself. Ask the man who has a tear of tenderness always ready to shed over the unfortunate; who, withal, is ready to distribute and willing to communicate,—ask him, if the best things which wits have said of pleasure, have expressed what he has felt, when, by a seasonable kindness, he has 'made the heart of the widow sing 'for joy.' Mark then the expressions of unutterable pleasure and harmony in his looks, and say, whether Solomon has not fixed the point of true enjoyment in the right place, when he declares, 'that he knew no 'good there was in any of the riches or honours of this 'world, *but for a man to do good with them in his life.*' Nor was it without reason he had made this judgment.—Doubtless, he had found and seen the insuffi-

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ciency of all sensual pleasures; how unable to furnish either a rational or a lasting scheme of happiness! how soon the best of them vanished! the less exceptionable in vanity, but the guilty both 'in vanity and vexation 'of spirit.' But that this was of so pure and refined a nature it burned without consuming: it was figuratively 'the widow's barrel of meal, which wasted not,—and 'cruse of oil, which never failed.'

It is not an easy matter to add weight to the testimony of *the wisest man*, upon the pleasure of doing good; or else the evidence of the philosopher Epicurus is very remarkable,—whose word in this matter is the more to be trusted, because a professed sensualist; who amidst all the delicacies and improvements of pleasure which a luxuriant fancy might strike out, still maintained, that the best way of enlarging human happiness was, by a communication of it to others.

And if it was necessary here, or there was time to refine upon this doctrine, one might farther maintain, exclusive of the happiness which the mind itself feels in the exercise of this virtue, that the very body of man is never in a better state than when he is most inclined to do good offices:—that as nothing more contributes to health than a benevolence of temper, so nothing generally is a stronger indication of it.

And what seems to confirm this opinion is, an observation, the truth of which must be submitted to every one's reflection,—namely, That a disinclination and backwardness to do good, is often attended, if not produced, by an indisposition of the animal as well as rational part of us:—so naturally do the soul and body, as in other cases so in this, mutually befriend or prey upon each other. And, indeed, setting aside all abstruser reasoning upon the point, I cannot conceive but that the very *mechanical motions* which maintain life must

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be performed with more equal vigour and freedom in that man whom a great and good soul perpetually inclines to show mercy to the miserable, than they can be in a poor, sordid, selfish wretch, whose little contracted heart melts to no man's affliction,—but sits brooding so intently over its own plots and concerns, as to see and feel nothing; and, in truth, enjoy nothing beyond himself: and of whom one may say what that great master of nature has, speaking of a natural sense of harmony, which I think with more justice may be said of Compassion, that the man who had it not—

> —Was fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils:
> The *motions* of his spirits dull as night,
> And his affections dark as *Erebus*.
> ——Let no such man be trusted.——

What Divines say of the mind, Naturalists have observed of the body; that there is no passion so natural to it as love,—which is the principle of doing good!—and though instances like this just mentioned, seem far from being proofs of it, yet it is not to be doubted, but that every hard-hearted man has felt much inward opposition before he could prevail upon himself to do aught to fix and deserve the character: and that what we say of long habits of vice, that they are hard to be subdued, may, with equal truth, be said concerning the natural impressions of benevolence,—That a man must do much violence to himself, and suffer many a painful struggle, before he can tear away so great and noble a part of his nature.—Of this, antiquity has preserved a beautiful instance in an anecdote of Alexander, the tyrant of Pheres, who, though he had so industriously hardened his heart as to seem to take delight in cruelty, insomuch as to murder many of his subjects every day, without cause and without pity,—

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yet, at the bare representation of a tragedy which related the misfortunes of Hecuba and Andromache, he was so touched with the fictitious distress which the poet had wrought up in it, that he burst out into a flood of tears.—The explication of which inconsistency is easy, and casts as great a lustre upon human nature, as the man himself was a disgrace to it. The case seems to have been this:—In *real* life he had been blinded with passions, and thoughtlessly hurried on by interest or resentment;—but here there was no room for motives of that kind; so that his attention being first caught hold of, and all his vices laid asleep,—then *Nature* awoke in triumph, and shewed how deeply she had sown the seeds of compassion in every man's breast; when tyrants, with vices the most at enmity with it, were not able entirely to root it out!

But this is painting an amiable virtue, and setting her off with shades that wickedness lends us; when one might safely trust to the force of her own natural charms, and ask, Whether anything under heaven, in its own nature, is more lovely and engaging?—To illustrate this the more, let us turn our thoughts within ourselves, and for a moment let any number of us here imagine ourselves at this instant engaged in drawing the most perfect and amiable character, such as, according to our conceptions of the Deity, we should think most acceptable to him, and most likely to be universally admired by all mankind.—I appeal to your own thoughts, whether the first idea which offered itself to most of our imaginations, would not be that of a compassionate benefactor, stretching forth his hands to raise up the helpless orphan? Whatever other virtues we should give our hero, we should all agree in making him a generous friend, who thought the opportunities of doing good to be the only charm of his prosperity:

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we should paint him like the Psalmist's 'river of God,' overflowing the thirsty parts of the earth, that he might enrich them, carrying plenty and gladness along with him. If this was not sufficient, and we were still desirous of adding a farther degree of perfection to so great a character, we should endeavour to think of some one, if human nature could furnish such a pattern, who, if occasion required, was willing to undergo all kinds of affliction,—to sacrifice himself,—to forget his dearest interests, and even lay down his life for the good of mankind!—And here,—O merciful Saviour! how would the bright original of thy unbounded goodness break in upon our hearts; 'Thou who becamest 'poor, that we might be rich!'—though Lord of all this world, yet 'hast not where to lay thy head!'—and though equal in power and glory to the great God of Nature, 'yet madest thyself of no reputation; tookest 'upon thee the form of a servant!'—submitting thyself, without opening thy mouth, to all the indignities which a thankless and undiscerning people could offer! and, at length, to accomplish our salvation, 'becamest obe-'dient unto death,' suffering thyself, as on this day,* 'to be led like a lamb to the slaughter!'

The consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion in the Son of God, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself: it is the great argument which the Apostles use in almost all their exhortations to good works:—'Beloved, if Christ so loved us,'—the inference is unavoidable; and gives strength and beauty to every thing else which can be urged upon the subject. And, therefore, I have reserved it for my last and warmest appeal, with which I would gladly finish

* Preached on Good Friday.

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this discourse, that at least for their sakes for whom it is preached, we might be left to the full impression of so exalted and so seasonable a motive;—that by reflecting upon the infinite labour of this day's love, in the instance of Christ's death, we may consider what an immense debt we owe to each other; and by calling to mind the amiable pattern of his life, in doing good,—we might learn in what manner we may best discharge it.

And, indeed, of all the methods in which a good mind would be willing to do it, I believe there can be none more beneficial, or comprehensive in its effects, than that for which we are met here together,—the proper education of poor children being the ground-work of almost every kind of charity, as that which makes every other subsequent act of it answer the pious expectation of the giver.

Without this foundation first laid, how much kindness in the progress of a benevolent man's life is unavoidably cast away! and sometimes where it is as senseless as the exposing a tender plant to all the inclemencies of a cruel season, and then going with sorrow to take it in, when the root is already dead. I said, therefore, this was the foundation of almost every kind of charity;—and might one not have added, of all policy too? since the many ill consequences which attended the want of it, though grievously felt by the parties themselves, are no less so by the community of which they are members; and, moreover, of all mischiefs, seem the hardest to be redressed,—insomuch, that when one considers the disloyal seductions of popery on one hand,—and, on the other, that no bad man, whatever he professes, can be a good subject,—one may venture to say, it had been cheaper and better for the nation to have borne the expense

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of instilling sound principles and good morals into the neglected children of the lower sort, especially in some parts of Great Britain, than to be obliged, so often as we have been within this last century, to rise up and arm ourselves against the rebellious effects which the want of them has brought down even to our doors. And, in fact, if we are to trust to antiquity, the truth of which in this case we have no reason to dispute, this matter has been looked upon of such vast importance to the civil happiness and peace of a people, that some commonwealths, the most eminent for political wisdom, have chose to make a public concern of it; thinking it much safer to be entrusted to the prudence of the magistrate, than to the mistaken tenderness or natural partiality of the parent.

It was consistent with this, and bespoke a very refined sense of policy in the Lacedemonians, (though by the way, I believe, different from what more modern politics would have directed in like circumstances,) when Antipater demanded of them fifty children, as hostages for the security of a distant engagement, they made this brave and wise answer: 'They would not,—they could not consent:—they 'would rather give him double the number of their 'best grown-up men:'—intimating, that, however they were distressed, they would choose any inconvenience rather than suffer the loss of their country's education; and the opportunity (which if once lost can never be regained) of giving their youth an early tincture of religion, and bringing them up to a love of the laws and constitution of their country. If this shews the great importance of a proper education to children of all ranks and conditions, what shall we say then of those whom the providence of

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God has placed in the very lowest lot of life, utterly cast out of the *way* of knowledge, without a parent,—sometimes may be without a friend to guide and instruct them, but what common pity and the necessity of their sad situation engage;—where the dangers which surround them on every side are so great and many, that for one fortunate passenger in life, who makes his way well in the world with such early disadvantages, and so dismal a setting out, we may reckon thousands who every day suffer shipwreck, and are lost for ever.

If there is a case under heaven which calls out aloud for the more immediate exercise of compassion, and which may be looked upon as the compendium of all charity, surely it is this; and I am persuaded there would want nothing more to convince the greatest enemy to these kinds of charities that it is so, but a bare opportunity of taking a nearer view of some of the more distressful objects of it.

Let him go into the dwellings of the unfortunate; into some mournful cottage, where poverty and affliction reign together. There let him behold the disconsolate widow,—sitting,—steeped in tears;—thus sorrowing over the infant she knows not how to succour:—'O my child! thou art now left exposed 'to a wide and vicious world, too full of snares and 'temptations for thy tender and unpractised age;'—perhaps a parent's love may magnify those dangers:—'But when I consider thou art driven out naked into 'the midst of them, without friends, without fortune, 'without instruction, my heart bleeds beforehand for 'the evils which may come upon thee! God, in 'whom we trusted, is witness, so low had his pro-'vidence placed us, that we never indulged one wish 'to have made thee rich:—virtuous we would have

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'made thee;—for thy father, *my husband, was a good* 'man, *and feared the Lord;*—and though all the 'fruits of his care and industry were little enough for 'our support, yet he honestly had determined to have 'spared some portion of it, scanty as it was, to have 'placed thee safely in the way of knowledge and 'instruction.—But, alas! he is gone from us, never to 'return more; and with him are fled the means of 'doing it. For, *Behold the creditor is come upon us,* 'to take all that we have!'—Grief is eloquent, and will not easily be imitated.—But let the man who is the least friend to distresses of this nature, conceive some disconsolate widow uttering her complaint, even in this manner; and then let him consider, 'if there 'is any sorrow like *this* sorrow, wherewith the Lord 'has afflicted *her?*' or whether there can be any charity like that of taking 'the child out of the 'mother's bosom,' and rescuing her from these apprehensions? Should a Heathen, a stranger to our holy religion, and the love it teaches, should he, 'as he 'journeyed, come to the place where *she lay*, when 'he saw, would he not have compassion on *her?* God forbid a Christian should *this day* want it; or at any time *look upon* such a distress, and 'pass by on 'the other side!'

Rather let him do as his Saviour taught him, 'bind 'up the wounds, and pour' comfort into the heart of one whom the hand of God has so bruised. Let him practise what it is, with Elijah's transport, to say to the afflicted widow,—'See, thy son liveth!'—liveth by my charity, and the bounty of this hour, to all the purposes which make life desirable,—to be made a good man and a profitable subject:—on one hand, to be trained up to such a sense of his duty, as may secure him an interest in the world to come;—and, with

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regard to this world, to be so brought up in it to a love of honest labour and industry, as all his life long to earn and eat his bread with joy and thankfulness.

'Much peace and happiness rest upon the head and 'heart of every one who thus brings children to 'Christ!—May the blessing of him that was ready to 'perish, come seasonably upon him!—The Lord com- 'fort him *when he most wants it!* When he lies sick 'upon his bed, make thou, O God! all his bed in his 'sickness! and for what he now scatters, give him 'that peace of thine which passeth all understanding, 'and which nothing in this world can either give 'or take away!' Amen.

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SERMON VI.

PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN IN THE TEMPLE.

LUKE, xviii. 14. First Part.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

THESE words are the judgment which our Saviour has left upon the behaviour and different degrees of merit in the two men, the Pharisee and the Publican, whom he represents, in the foregoing parable, as going up into the temple to pray. In what manner they discharged this great and solemn duty, it will best be seen from a consideration of the prayer which each is said to have addressed to God on the occasion.

The Pharisee, instead of an act of humiliation in that awful presence before which he stood,—with an air of triumph and self-sufficiency, thanks God that he had not made him like others,—extortioners, adulterers, unjust, or even as this publican.—The publican is represented as standing afar off, and, with a heart touched with humility from a just sense of his own unworthiness, is said only to have smote upon his breast, saying,—God be merciful to me a sinner!—'I tell you,' adds our Saviour, 'this man went down 'to his house justified rather than the other.'

Though the justice of this determination strikes every one at first sight, it may not be amiss to enter into a more particular examination of the evidence and reasons upon which it might be founded; not only because it may place the equity of this decision

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in favour of the publican in a stronger light,—but that the subject seems likely to lead me to a train of reflections not unsuitable to the solemnity of the season.*

The Pharisee was one of that sect, who, in our Saviour's time, what by the austerity of their lives,—their public alms-deeds,—and greater pretences to piety than other men, had gradually wrought themselves into much credit and reputation with the people; and, indeed, as the bulk of these are easily caught with appearances, their character seems to have been admirably well suited to such a purpose.—If you looked no farther than the outward part of it, you would think it made up of all goodness and perfection; an uncommon sanctity of life, guarded by great decorum and severity of manners,—profuse and frequent charities to the poor,—many acts of religion,—much observance of the law,—much abstinence,—much prayer.

It is painful to suspect the appearance of so much good;—and would have been so here, had not our blessed Saviour left us their real character upon record, and drawn up by himself in one word,—That the sect were like whitened sepulchres, all fair and beautiful without, and enriched there with whatever could attract the eye of the beholder; but, when searched withinside, were full of corruption, and of whatever could shock and disgust the searcher. So that, with all their affectation of piety, and more extraordinary strictness and regularity in their outward deportment, all was irregular and uncultivated within;—and all these fair pretences, how promising soever, blasted by the indulgence of the worst of human

* Preached in Lent.

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passions,—pride,—spiritual pride (the worst of all pride),—hypocrisy, self-love, covetousness, extortion, cruelty, and revenge. What pity it is that the sacred name of Religion should ever have been borrowed, and employed in so bad a work as in covering over such a black catalogue of vices! or that the fair form of Virtue should have been thus disgraced and for ever drawn into suspicion, from the unworthy uses of this kind to which the artful and abandoned have often put her!—The Pharisee seems to have had not many scruples of this kind; and the prayer he makes use of in the temple is a true picture of the man's heart, and shews with what a disposition and frame of mind he came to worship.

God! I thank thee that thou hast formed me of different materials from the rest of my species, whom thou hast created frail and vain by nature, but by choice and disposition utterly corrupt and wicked!

Me, thou hast fashioned in a different mould, and hast infused so large a portion of thy spirit into me, lo! I am raised above the temptations and desires to which flesh and blood are subject!—I thank thee that thou hast made me thus;—not a frail vessel of clay, like that of other men,—or even this publican, but that I stand here a chosen and sanctified vessel unto thee!

After this obvious paraphrase upon the words, which speaks no more than the true spirit of the Pharisee's prayer,—you would naturally ask, What reason was there for all this triumph?—or what foundation could he have to insult in this manner over the infirmities of mankind,—or even those of the humble publican who stood before him?—Why, says he, I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.—Truly, a very indifferent account of him-

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self;—and if that was all he had to offer in his own behalf, God knows it was but a weak foundation to support so much arrogance and self-conceit; because the observance of both the one and the other of these ordinances might be supposed well enough to be consistent with the most profligate of life and manners.

The conduct and behaviour of the publican appear very different;—and, indeed, as much the reverse to this as you could conceive. But before we enter upon that, as I have spoken largely to the character of the Pharisee, 'twill be but justice to say a word or two in general to his.—The publican was one of that order of men employed by the Roman emperors in levying the taxes and contributions which were from time to time extracted from Judea as a conquered nation. Whether from the particular fate of that employment, owing to the fixed aversion which men have to part with what is their own, or from whatever other causes it happened,—so it was, that the whole set of men were odious; insomuch, that the name of a publican was a term of reproach and infamy amongst the Jews.

Perhaps the many instances of rigour to which their office may direct them,—heightened sometimes by a mixture of cruelty and insolence of their own, —and possibly always made to appear worse than they were, by the loud clamours and misrepresentations of others,—all might have contributed to form and fix this odium. But it was here, no doubt, as in all other classes of men whose professions expose them to more temptations than that of others,—that there are numbers who still behave well, and who, amidst all the snares and opportunities which lie in their way, passed through them, not only with an unblemished character, but with the inward testimony of a good conscience.

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The publican, in all likelihood, was one of these;—and the sentiments of candour and humility which the view of his condition inspired, are such as could come only from a heart and character thus described.

He goes up into the temple to pay his sacrifice of prayer:—in the discharge of which he pleads no merit of his own,—enters into no comparison with others,—or justification of himself with God; but, in reverence to that holier part of the temple where his presence was supposed more immediately to be displayed,—he keeps afar off, is afraid to lift up his eyes towards Heaven;—but smites upon his breast, and, in a short but fervent ejaculation,—submissively begs God to have mercy upon his sins.—O God! how precious, how amiable is true humility!—what a difference in thy sight does it make to consist betwixt man and man! Pride was not made for a creature with such manifold imperfections:—religious pride is a dress which still worse becomes him:—because, of all others, 'tis that to which he has the least pretence:—the best of us fall seven times a day, and thereby add some degree of unprofitableness to the character of those who do all that is commanded them.—Was I perfect therefore, says Job, I would not know my soul; I would be silent, I would be ignorant of my own righteousness; for, should I say, I was perfect, it would prove me to be perverse. From this introduction I will take occasion to recommend this virtue of religious humility, which so naturally falls from the subject, and which cannot more effectually be enforced, than by an enquiry into the chief causes which produce the opposite vice to it,—that of spiritual pride;—for in this malady of the mind of man,—the case is parallel with most others of his body, the dangers of which can never rightly be apprehended; nor can remedies be

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applied either with judgment or success, till they are traced back to their first principles, and the seeds of the disorder are laid open and considered.

And first, I believe one of the most general causes of spiritual pride is that which seems to have misled the Pharisee ;—a mistaken notion of the true principles of his religion. He thought, no doubt, that the whole of it was comprehended in the two articles of paying tithes, and frequent fasting; and that when he had discharged his conscience of them,—he had done all that was required at his hands, and might with reason go and thank God that he had not made him like others. —It is not to be questioned, but, through force of this error, the Pharisee might think himself to be, what he pretended, a religious and upright man :—for however he might be brought to act a double and insincere part in the eyes of men upon worldly views,—it is not to be supposed—that when he stood by himself, apart in the temple, and no witnesses of what passed between him and his God,—that he should knowingly and wilfully have dared to act so open and barefaced a scene of mockery in the face of Heaven. This is scarce probable ;—and therefore must have been owing to some delusion in his education, which had early implanted in his mind false and wretched notions of the essentials of religion,—which, as he grew up, had proved the seeds of infinite error, both in practice and speculation.

With the rest of this sect, he had been so principled and instructed as to observe a scrupulous nicety and most religious exactness in the lesser matters of religion,—its frequent washings,—its fastings and other external rites, of no merit in themselves,—but to stand exempted from the more troublesome exactness in the weightier matters of the law, which were of eternal

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and unchangeable obligation. So that they were in truth blind guides,—who thus will strain at a gnat, and yet swallow a camel; and, as our Saviour reproves them from a familiar instance of domestic inconsistency, —would make clean the outside of the cup and platter, —yet suffer the inside,—the most material part,—to be full of corruption and excess. From this knowledge of the character and principles of the Pharisee, 'tis easy to account for his sentiments and behaviour in the temple, which were just such as they would have led one to have expected.

Thus it has always happened, by a fatality common to all such abuses of religion, as make it to consist in external rights and ceremonies, more than inward purity and integrity of heart.—As these outward things are easily put in practice, and capable of being attained to without much capacity, or much opposition to flesh and blood,—it too naturally betrays the professors of it into a groundless persuasion of their own godliness, and a despicable one of that of others in their religious capacities, and the relations in which they stand towards God: which is the very definition of spiritual pride.

When the true heat and spirit of devotion is thus lost and extinguished under a cloud of ostentatious ceremonies and gestures, as is remarkable in the Roman church,—where the celebration of high mass, when set off to the best advantage with all its scenical decorations and finery, looks more like a theatrical performance than that humble and solemn appeal which dust and ashes are offering up to the throne of God;—when religion, I say, is thus clogged and borne down by such a weight of ceremonies, it is much easier to put in pretensions to holiness upon such a mechanical system as is left of it, than where the character is only to

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be got and maintained by a painful conflict and perpetual war against the passions. 'Tis easier, for instance, for a zealous Papist to cross himself and tell his beads, than for an humble Protestant to subdue the lusts of anger, intemperance, cruelty, and revenge, to appear before his Maker with that preparation of mind which becomes him. The operation of being sprinkled with holy water is not so difficult in itself as that of being chaste and spotless within,—conscious of no dirty thought or dishonest action. 'Tis a much shorter way to kneel down at a confessional and receive absolution,—than to live so to deserve it,—not at the hands of men,—but at the hands of God,—who sees the heart, and cannot be imposed upon. The achievement of keeping Lent, or abstaining from flesh on certain days, is not so hard as that of abstaining from the works of it at all times;—especially, as the point is generally managed among the richer sort with such art and epicurism at their tables,—and with such indulgence to a poor mortified appetite,—that an entertainment upon a fast is much more likely to produce a *surfeit* than a fit of sorrow.

One might run the parallel much farther; but this may be sufficient to shew how dangerous and delusive these mistakes are,—how apt to mislead and overset weak minds, which are ever apt to be caught by the pomp of such external parts of religion. This is so evident, that even in our own church, where there is the greatest chastity in things of this nature,—and of which none are retained in our worship but what, I believe, tend to excite and assist it,—yet, so strong a propensity is there in our nature to sense, and so unequal a match is the understanding of the bulk of mankind for the impressions of outward things,—that we see thousands who every day mistake the shadow

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for the substance; and, was it fairly put to the trial, would exchange the reality for the appearance.

You see this was almost universally the case of the Jewish church;—where, for want of proper guard and distinction betwixt the means of religion and religion itself, the ceremonial part in time eat away the moral part, and left nothing but a shadow behind.—'Tis to be feared the buffooneries of the Romish church bid fair to do it the same ill office, to the disgrace and utter ruin of Christianity, wherever Popery is established. What then remains, but that we rectify these gross and pernicious notions of religion, and place it upon its true bottom; which we can only do by bringing back religion to that cool point of reason which first shewed us its obligation,—by always remembering that God is a Spirit,—and must be worshipped suitable to his nature, *i. e.* in spirit and in truth;—and that the most acceptable sacrifice we can offer him, is a virtuous and upright mind:—and however necessary it is, not to leave the ceremonial and positive parts of religion undone,—yet, not like the Pharisee, to rest there, and omit the weightier matters, but keep this in view perpetually, that though the instrumental duties of religion are duties of unquestionable obligation to us,—yet they are still but Instrumental Duties, conducive to the great end of all religion,—which is, to purify our hearts—and conquer our passions;—and, in a word, to make us wiser and better men,—better neighbours,—better citizens, and better servants to God.

To whom, &c.

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SERMON VII.

VINDICATION OF HUMAN NATURE.

ROMANS, xiv. 7.

For none of us liveth to himself.

THERE is not a sentence in Scripture which strikes a narrow soul with greater astonishment;—and one might as easily engage to clear up the darkest problem in geometry to an ignorant mind, as make a sordid one comprehend the truth and reasonableness of this plain proposition,—No man liveth to himself!—Why?—Does any man live to any thing else?—In the whole compass of human life, can a prudent man steer to a safer point?—Not to live to himself!—To whom then?—Can any interests or concerns which are foreign to a man's self have such a claim over him that he must serve under them,—suspend his own pursuits,—step out of his right course till others have passed by him and attained the several ends and purposes of living before him?

If, with a selfish heart, such an enquirer should happen to have a speculating head too, he will proceed, and ask you, Whether this same principle which the apostle here throws out of the life of man, is not in fact the great bias of his nature?—that however we may flatter ourselves with fine-spun notions of disinterestedness and heroism in what we do, were the most popular of our actions stripped naked, and the true

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motives and intentions of them searched to the bottom, we should find little reason for triumph upon that score.——

In a word, he will say, that a man is altogether a bubble to himself in this matter; and that after all that can be said in this behalf, the truest definition that can be given of him is this, That he is a selfish animal; and that all his actions have so strong a tincture of that character, as to show, to whomever else he was intended to live, that in fact he lives only to himself.

Before I reply directly to this accusation, I cannot help observing by the way, that there is scarce any thing which has done more disservice to social virtue than the frequent representations of human nature under this hideous picture of deformity; which by leaving out all that is generous and friendly in the heart of man, has sunk him below the level of a brute, as if he was a composition of all that was mean-spirited and selfish. Surely 'tis one step towards acting well, to think worthily of our nature: and, as in common life the way to make a man honest, is to suppose him so, and treat him as such,—so here, to set some value upon ourselves, enables us to support the character, and even inspires and adds sentiments of generosity and virtue to those which we have already preconceived. The Scripture tells, That God made man in his own image,—not surely in the sensitive and corporeal part of him: that could bear no resemblance with a pure and infinite Spirit:—but what resemblance he bore was undoubtedly in the moral rectitude, and the kind and benevolent affections of his nature. And though the brightness of his image has been sullied greatly by the fall of man in our first parents, and the characters of it rendered still less legible by the many superinductions of his own de-

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praved appetites since,—yet 'tis a laudable pride and a true greatness of mind to cherish a belief, that there is so much of that glorious image still left upon it, as shall restrain him from base and disgraceful actions: to answer which end, what thought can be more conducive than that of our being made in the likeness of the greatest and best of Beings? This is a plain consequence. And the consideration of it should have in some measure been a protection to human nature, from the rough usage she has met with from the satirical pens of so many of the French writers, as well as of our own country, who, with more wit than well-meaning, have desperately fallen foul upon the whole species, as a set of creatures incapable of either private friendship or public spirit, but just as the case suited their own interest and advantage.

That there is selfishness and meanness enough in the souls of one part of the world, to hurt the credit of the other part of it, is what I shall not dispute against; but to judge of the whole from this bad sample, and because one man is plotting and artful in his nature,—or, a second openly makes his pleasure or his profit the whole centre of all his designs,—or because a third strait-hearted wretch sits confined within himself,—feels no misfortunes but those which touch himself;—to involve the whole race without mercy under such detested characters, is a conclusion as false as it is pernicious; and was it in general to gain credit, would serve no end, but the rooting out of our nature all that is generous; and planting in the stead of it such an aversion to each other, as must untie the bands of society, and rob us of one of the greatest pleasures of it, the mutual communications of kind offices; and by poisoning the fountain, render every thing suspected that flows through it.

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To the honour of human nature, the Scripture teaches us, that God made man upright;—and though he has since found out many inventions, which have much dishonoured this noble structure, yet the foundation of it stands as it was,—the whole frame and design of it carried on upon social virtue and public spirit, and every member of us so evidently supported by this strong cement, that we may say with the apostle, that no man liveth to himself. In whatsoever light we view him, we shall see evidently that there is no station or condition of his life,—no office, or relation, or circumstance, but there arise from it so many ties, so many indispensable claims upon him, as must perpetually carry him beyond any selfish consideration, and show plainly, that was a man foolishly wicked enough to design to live to himself alone, he would either find it impracticable, or he would lose at least the very thing which made life itself desirable. We know that our Creator, like an all-wise contriver, in this, as in all other of his works, has implanted in mankind such appetites and inclinations as were suitable for their state; that is, such as would naturally lead him to the love of society and friendship, without which he would have been found in a worse condition than the very beasts of the field. No one, therefore, who lives in society, can be said to live to himself;—he lives to his God,—to his king, and his country;—he lives to his family, to his friends, to all under his trust,—and, in a word, he lives to the whole race of mankind:—whatsoever has the character of man, and wears the same image of God that he does, is truly his brother, and has a just claim to his kindness.—That this is the case in fact, as well as in theory, may be made plain to any one who has made any observations upon human life.—When we have traced it through all

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its connections,—viewed it under the several obligations which succeed each other in a perpetual rotation through the different stages of a hasty pilgrimage, we shall find that these do operate so strongly upon it, and lay us justly under so many restraints, that we are every hour sacrificing something to society, in return for the benefits we receive from it.

To illustrate this, let us take a short survey of the life of any one man, not liable to great exceptions, but such a life as is common to most; let us examine it merely to this point, and try how far it will answer such a representation.

If we begin with him in that early age wherein the strongest marks of undisguised tenderness and disinterested compassion show themselves,—I might previously observe, with what impressions he is come out of the hands of God, with the very bias upon his nature which prepares him for the character which he was designed to fulfil. But let us pass by the years which denote childhood,—as no lawful evidence, you'll say, in this dispute; let us follow him to the period when he is just got loose from tutors and governors, when his actions may be argued upon with less exception: if you observe, you will find that one of the first and leading propensities of his nature is, that which discovers itself in the desire of society, and the spontaneous love towards those of his kind:—and though the natural wants and exigencies of his condition are, no doubt, one reason of this amiable impulse,—God having founded that in him as a provisional security to make him social,—yet, though it is a reason in nature, 'tis a reason to him yet undiscovered. Youth is not apt to philosophize so deeply,—but follows, as it feels itself prompted by the inward workings of benevolence,—without view to itself, or previous cal-

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culation either of the loss or profit which may accrue. Agreeably to this, observe how warmly, how heartily he enters into friendships,—how disinterested, and unsuspicious in the choice of them!—how generous and open in his professions!—how sincere and honest in making them good!—When his friend is in distress,—what lengths he will go!—what hazards he will bring upon himself!—what embarrassment upon his affairs, to extricate and serve him! If man is altogether a selfish creature, as these moralizers would make him, 'tis certain he does not arrive at the full maturity of it in this time of his life.—No. If he deserves any accusation, 'tis in the other extreme, 'That in his youth he is generally more fool than 'knave;'—and so far from being suspected of living to himself, that he lives rather to every body else; the unconsciousness of art and design, in his own intentions, rendering him so utterly void of suspicion of it in others, as to leave him too oft a bubble to every one who will take the advantage.—But you'll say, he soon abates of these transports of disinterested love; and as he grows older,—grows wiser, and learns to live more to himself.

Let us examine.——

That a longer knowledge of the world, and some experience of insincerity,—will teach him a lesson of more caution in the choice of friendships, and less forwardness in the undistinguished offers of his services, is what I grant. But if he cools of these, does he not grow warmer still in connections of a different kind? Follow him, I pray you, into the next stage of life, where he has entered into engagements, and appears as the father of a family, and you will see the passion still remains,—the stream somewhat more confined,—but runs the stronger for it;—the same benevolence of

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heart, altered only in its course, and the difference of objects towards which it tends. Take a short view of him in this light, as acting under the many tender claims which that relation lays upon him,—spending many weary days and sleepless nights,—utterly forgetful of himself, intent only upon his family, and with an anxious heart contriving and labouring to preserve it from distress, against that hour when he shall be taken from its protection. Does such a one live to himself?—He who rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, to save others the sorrow of doing so after him: does such a one live only to himself?—Ye, who are parents, answer this question for him. How oft have ye sacrificed your health,—your ease, your pleasures,—nay, the very comforts of your lives, for the sake of your children!—How many indulgences have ye given up!—What self-denials and difficulties have ye cheerfully undergone for them!—In their sickness, or reports of their misconduct, how have ye gone on your way sorrowing! What alarms within you, when fancy forbodes but imaginary misfortunes hanging over them!—but when real ones have overtaken them, and mischief befallen them in the way in which they have gone, how sharper than a sword have ye felt the workings of parental kindness! In whatever period of human life we look for proofs of selfishness,—let us not seek them in this relation of a parent, whose whole life, when truly known, is often little else but a succession of cares, heart-aches, and disquieting apprehensions,—enough to show that he is but an instrument in the hands of God, to provide for the well-being of others, to serve their interest as well as his own.

If you try the truth of this reasoning upon every other part or situation of the same life, you will find

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it holds good in one degree or other. Take a view of it out of these closer connections, both of a friend and parent;—consider him for a moment under that natural alliance in which even a heathen poet has placed him; namely, that of a man;—and as such, to his honour, as one incapable of standing unconcerned in whatever concerns his fellow-creatures. — Compassion has so great a share in our nature, and the miseries of this world are so constant an exercise of it, as to leave it in no one's power, who deserves the name of man, in this respect,—to live to himself.

He cannot stop his ears against the cries of the unfortunate.—The sad story of the fatherless, and him that has no helper, must be heard.—'The sorrowful 'sighing of the prisoner will come before him;' and a thousand other untold cases of distress to which the life of man is subject, find a way to his heart, let interest guide the passage as it will.—'If he has this 'world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, he 'will not be able to shut up his bowels of compassion 'from him.'

Let any man of common humanity look back upon his own life as subjected to these strong claims, and recollect the influence they have had upon him. How oft the mere impulses of generosity and compassion have led him out of his way!—In how many acts of charity and kindness his fellow-feeling for others has made him forget himself!—In neighbourly offices, how oft he has acted against all considerations of profits, convenience, nay sometimes even of justice itself!—Let him add to this account, how much, in the progress of his life, has been given up even to the lesser obligations of civility and good manners!—What restraints they have laid him under! How large a portion of his time,—how much of his inclination and

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the plan of life he should most have wished, has from time to time been made a sacrifice to his good nature, and disinclination to give pain or disgust to others!

Whoever takes a view of the life of man in this glass wherein I have shown it, will find it so beset and hemmed in with obligations of one kind or other, as to leave little room to suspect that man can live to himself: and so closely has our Creator linked us together, as well as all other parts of his works, for the preservation of that harmony in the frame and system of things which his wisdom has at first established,—that we find this bond of mutual dependence, however relaxed, is too strong to be broke: and I believe, that the most selfish men find it so, and that they cannot, in fact, live so much to themselves as the narrowness of their own hearts inclines them. If these reflections are just upon the moral relations in which we stand to each other, let us close the examination with a short reflection upon the great relation in which we stand to God.

The first and more natural thought on this subject, which at one time or other will thrust itself upon every man's mind, is this,—That there is a God who made me,—to whose gift I owe all the powers and faculties of my soul, to whose providence I owe all the blessings of my life, and by whose permission it is that I exercise and enjoy them; that I am placed in this world as a creature of but a day, hastening to the place from whence I shall not return;—that I am accountable for my conduct and behaviour to this great and wisest of Beings, before whose judgment-seat I must finally appear, and receive the things done in my body,—whether they are good, or whether they are bad.

Can any one doubt but the most inconsiderate of men sometimes sit down coolly, and make some such plain reflections as these upon their state and condition?—or,

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that after they have made them, can one imagine they lose all effect?—As little appearance as there is of religion in the world, there is a great deal of its influence felt in its affairs;—nor can one so root out the principles of it, but, like nature, they will return again, and give checks and interruptions to guilty pursuits. There are seasons when the thoughts of a just God overlooking, and the terror of an after-reckoning, have made the most determined tremble and stop short in the execution of a wicked purpose: and if we conceive that the worst of men lay some restraint upon themselves from the weight of this principle, what shall we think of the good and virtuous part of the world, who live under the perpetual influence of it,—who sacrifice their appetites and passions from a consciousness of their duty to God; and consider him as the object to whom they have dedicated their service, and make that the first principle and ultimate end of all their actions? —How many real and unaffected instances there are in the world of men thus governed, will not concern us so much to enquire, as to take care that we are of the number: which may God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

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SERMON VIII.

TIME AND CHANCE.

ECCLES. ix. 11.

I returned and saw, under the sun, that the race is not to the swift,—nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill;—but time and chance happeneth to them all.

WHEN a man casts a look upon this melancholy description of the world, and sees, contrary to all his guesses and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men,—how oft it happens in the world that there is not even bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, &c.—he is apt to conclude, with a sigh upon it,—in the words, though not in the sense of the wise man, That time and chance happeneth to them all. That time and chance,—apt seasons and fit conjunctures,—have the greatest sway in the turns and disposals of men's fortunes; and that, as these lucky hits (as they are called) happen to be for or against a man,—they either open the way to his advancement against all obstacles,—or block it up against all helps and attempts; that, as the text intimates, neither *wisdom*, nor *understanding*, nor *skill*, shall be able to surmount them.

However widely we may differ in our reasonings upon this observation of Solomon's, the authority of the observation is strong beyond doubt; and the evidence given of it in all ages so alternately confirmed by

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examples and complaints, as to leave the fact itself unquestionable.—That things are carried on in this world sometimes so contrary to all our reasoning, and the seeming probabilities of success,—that even the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;—nay, what is stranger still,—nor yet bread to the wise, who should last stand in want of it;—nor yet riches to men of understanding, who you would think best qualified to acquire them;—nor yet favour to men of skill, whose merit and pretences bid the fairest for it;—but that there are some secret and unseen workings in human affairs, which baffle all our endeavours,—and turn aside the course of things in such a manner,—that the most likely causes disappoint and fail of producing for us the effect which we wished and naturally expected from them.

You will see a man, of whom was you to form a conjecture from the appearance of things in his favour,—you would say was setting out in the world with the fairest prospect of making his fortune in it,—with all the advantages of birth to recommend him,—of personal merit to speak for him,—and of friends to help and push him forwards; you will behold him, notwithstanding this, disappointed in every effect you might naturally have looked for from them: every step he takes towards his advancement, something invisible shall pull him back, some unforeseen obstacle shall rise up perpetually in his way, and keep him there.—In every application he makes,—some untoward circumstance shall blast it.—He shall rise early,—late take rest,—and eat the bread of carefulness;—yet some happier man shall still rise up, and ever step in before him, and leave him struggling, to the end of his life, in the very same place in which he first began it.

The history of a second shall, in all respects, be the

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contrast to this. He shall come into the world with the most unpromising appearance,—shall set forwards without fortune, without friends,—without talents to procure him either the one or the other;—nevertheless, you will see this clouded prospect brighten up insensibly, unaccountably before him; every thing presented in his way shall turn out beyond his expectations;—in spite of that chain of insurmountable difficulties which first threatened him,—time and chance shall open him a way;—a series of successful occurrences shall lead him by the hand to the summit of honour and fortune; and, in a word, without giving him the pains of thinking, or the credit of projecting it, shall place him in safe possession of all that ambition could wish for.

The histories of the lives and fortunes of men are full of instances of this nature,—where favourable times and lucky accidents have done for them what wisdom or skill could not: and there is scarce any one who has lived long in the world, who, upon looking backwards, will not discover such a mixture of these in the many successful turns which have happened in this life, as to leave him very little reason to dispute against the fact, and, I should hope, as little upon the conclusions to be drawn from it.

Some, indeed, from a superficial view of this representation of things, have atheistically inferred,—that because there was so much of lottery in this life,—and mere casualty seemed to have such a share in the disposal of our affairs,—that the providence of God stood neuter and unconcerned in their several workings, leaving them to the mercy of time and chance to be furthered or disappointed as such blind agents directed:—whereas, in truth, the very opposite conclusion follows: for, consider,—if a superior intelligent Power did

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not sometimes cross and over-rule events in this world,—then our policies and designs in it would always answer according to the wisdom and stratagem in which they were laid, and every cause, in the course of things, would produce its natural effect without variation. Now, as this is not the case, it necessarily follows, from Solomon's reasoning, that, if the race is not to the swift, if knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want,—nor care and industry always make men rich,—nor art and skill infallibly make men high in the world, that there is some other cause which mingles itself in human affairs, and governs and turns them as it pleases;—which cause can be no other than the First Cause of all things, and the secret and over-ruling providence of that Almighty God, who, though his dwelling is so high, yet he humbleth himself to behold the things that are done on earth, raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the beggar from the dunghill; and, contrary to all hopes, putting him with princes, even with the princes of his people;—which, by the way, was the case of David, who makes the acknowledgment.—And, no doubt,—one reason why God has selected to his own disposal so many instances as this, where events have run counter to all probabilities,—was to give testimony to his providence in governing the world and to engage us to a consideration and dependence upon it, for the event and success of our undertakings.* For undoubtedly,—as I said, it should seem but suitable to nature's laws, that the race should ever be to the swift,—and the battle to the strong;—it is reasonable that the best contrivances and means should have best success;—and since it often falls out otherwise in the case of man, where the

* *Vide* Tillotson's Sermon on this subject.

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wisest projects are overthrown,—and the most hopeful means are blasted, and time and chance happen to all,—you must call on the Deity to untie this knot:—for though at sundry times, sundry events fall out,—which we, who look no farther than the events themselves, call Chance, because they fall out quite contrary both to our intentions and our hopes,—yet, at the same time, in respect of God's providence over-ruling in these events, it were profane to call them chance, for they are pure designation; and though invisible, are still the regular dispensations of the superintending power of that Almighty Being from whom all the laws and powers of nature are derived; who, as he has appointed, so holds them as instruments in his hands;—and, without invading the liberty and free will of his creatures, can turn the passions and desires of their hearts to fulfil his own righteousness, and work such effects in human affairs, which to us seem merely *casual*,—but to him certain and determined; and what his infinite wisdom sees necessary to be brought about for the government and preservation of the world, over which Providence perpetually presides.

When the sons of Jacob had cast their brother Joseph into the pit for his destruction,—one would think, if ever any incident which concerned the life of man deserved to be called Chance, it was this,—That the company of the Ishmaelites should happen to pass by, in that open country, at that very place, at that time too, when this barbarity was committed. After he was rescued by so favourable a contingency,—his life and future fortune still depended upon a series of contingencies equally improbable: for instance, had the business of the Ishmaelites, who bought him, carried them from Gilead to any other part of the world besides Egypt; or, when they arrived there, had

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they sold their bond-slave to any other man than Potiphar, throughout the whole empire;—or, after that disposal, had the unjust accusations of his master's wife cast the youth into any other dungeon than that where the king's prisoners were kept;—or had it fallen out at any other crisis than when Pharaoh's chief butler was cast there too;—had this, or any other of these events fallen out otherwise than it did,—a series of unmerited misfortunes had overwhelmed him,—and, in consequence, the whole land of Egypt and Canaan. From the first opening to the conclusion of this long and interesting transaction, the Providence of God suffered every thing to take its course;—the malice and cruelty of Joseph's brethren wrought their worst mischief against him; banished him from his country and the protection of his parent.—The lust and baseness of a disappointed woman sunk him still deeper;—loaded his character with an unjust reproach;—and, to complete his ruin, doomed him, friendless, to the miseries of a hopeless prison, where he lay neglected. Providence, though it did not cross these events,—yet Providence bent them to the most merciful ends. When the whole *drama* was opened, then the wisdom and contrivance of every part of it was displayed. Then it appeared, it was not they (as the patriarch inferred in consolation of his brethren), it was not they that sold him, but God;—'twas He sent him thither before them; His superintending power availed itself of their passions,—directed the operations of them, held the chain in his hand, and turned and wound it to his own purpose. 'Ye verily thought 'evil against me,—but God meant it for good;'—'ye had the guilt of a bad intention,—His providence 'the glory of accomplishing a good one, by preserving 'you a posterity upon the earth, and bringing to pass

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'as it is this day, to save much people alive.'—All history is full of such testimonies; which, tho' they may convince those who look no deeper than the surface of things, that time and chance happen to all,—yet to those who look deeper, they manifest at the same time, that there is a hand much busier in human affairs than what we vainly calculate; which though the projectors of this world overlook,—or at least make no allowance for in the formation of their plans, they generally find in the execution of them. And though the fatalist may urge, that every event in this life is brought about by the ministry and chain of natural causes,—yet, in answer, let him go one step higher,—and consider,—whose power it is that enables these causes to work;—whose knowledge it is that foresees what will be their effects;—whose goodness it is that is invisibly conducting them forwards to the best and greatest ends, for the happiness of his creatures.

So that, as a great reasoner justly distinguishes upon this point,—'It is not only religiously speaking, 'but with the strictest and most philosophical truth 'of expression, that the Scripture tells us, *that God* '*commandeth* the ravens;—that they are his direc-'tions which *the winds and the seas obey.* If his 'servant hides himself by the brook, such an order of 'causes and effects shall be laid,—that the fowls of 'the air shall minister to his support. When this 'resource fails, and his prophet is directed to go to 'Zarephath,—for that he has *commanded* a widow 'woman there to sustain him,—the same hand which 'leads the prophet to the gate of the city—shall lead 'forth the distressed widow to the same place, to take 'him under her roof; and though upon the impulse of a 'different occasion, shall nevertheless be made to fulfil

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'his promise and intention of their mutual preserva-
'tion.'

Thus much for the truth and illustration of this great and fundamental doctrine of a Providence; the belief of which is of such consequence to us, as to be the great support and comfort of our lives.

Justly, therefore, might the Psalmist upon this declaration,—that the Lord is King,—conclude, That the earth may be glad therefore; yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.

May God grant the persuasion may make us as virtuous as it has reason to make us joyful! and that it may bring forth in us the fruits of good living, to his praise and glory!—to whom be all might, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore! Amen.

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SERMON IX.

THE CHARACTER OF HEROD.*

MATT. ii. 17, 18.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, — In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

THE words which St. Matthew cites here as fulfilled by the cruelty and ambition of Herod,—are in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, the 15th verse. In the foregoing chapter, the prophet having declared God's intention of turning the mourning of his people into joy, by the restoration of the tribes which had been led away captive into Babylon,—he proceeds, in the beginning of this chapter, which contains this prophecy, to give a more particular description of the great joy and festivity of that promised day, when they were to return once more to their own land, to enter upon their ancient possessions, and enjoy again all the privileges they had lost; and amongst others, and what was above them all,—the favour and protection of God, and the continuation of his mercies to them and their posterity.

To make, therefore, the impression of this change the stronger upon their minds,—he gives a very pathetic representation of the preceding sorrow on that day when they were first led away captive.

* Preached on Innocents' Day.

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Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Rama; lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were not.

To enter into the full sense and beauty of this description, it is to be remembered that the tomb of Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, as we read in the 35th of Genesis, was situated near Rama, and betwixt that place and Bethlehem. Upon which circumstance the prophet raises one of the most affecting scenes that could be conceived; for as the tribes in their sorrowful journey betwixt Rama and Bethlehem, in their way to Babylon, were supposed to pass by this monumental pillar of their ancestor Rachel, Jacob's wife, the prophet, by a common liberty in rhetoric, introduces her as rising up out of her sepulchre, and as the common mother of two of their tribes, weeping for her children, bewailing the sad catastrophe of her posterity led away into a strange land,—refusing to be comforted, because they were not;—lost and cut off from their country, and, in all likelihood, never to be restored back to her again.

The Jewish interpreters say upon this, that the patriarch Jacob buried Rachel in this very place, foreseeing by the spirit of prophecy, that his posterity should that way be led captive, that she might, as they passed her, intercede for them.

But this fanciful superstructure upon the passage seems to be little else than a mere dream of some of the Jewish doctors; and indeed had they not dreamt it when they did, 'tis great odds but some of the Romish dreamers would have hit upon it before now. For as it favours the doctrine of intercessions,—if there had not been undeniable vouchers for the real inventors of the conceit, one should much sooner have

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sought for it among the oral traditions of this church, than in the Talmud,—where it is.

But this by the bye. There is still another interpretation of the words here cited by St. Matthew, which altogether excludes this scenical representation I have given of them.—By which 'tis thought, that the lamentation of Rachel here described, has no immediate reference to Rachel, Jacob's wife, but that it simply alludes to the sorrows of her descendants, the distressed mothers of the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim, who might accompany their children led into captivity as far as Rama, in their way to Babylon, who wept and wailed upon this sad occasion, and, as the prophet describes them in the person of Rachel, refusing to be comforted for the loss of her children; looking upon their departure without hope or prospect of ever beholding a return.

Whichever of the two senses you give the words of the prophet, the application of them by the evangelist is equally just and faithful; for as the former scene he relates was transacted upon the very same stage,—in the same district of Bethlehem, near Rama, where so many mothers of the same tribe now suffered this second most affecting blow,—the words of Jeremiah, as the evangelist observes, were literally accomplished; and, no doubt, in that horrid day, a voice was heard again in Rama; lamentation and bitter weeping;—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted:—every Bethlehemitish mother involved in this calamity, beholding it with hopeless sorrow,—gave vent to it,—each one bewailing her children, and lamenting the hardness of their lot, with the anguish of a heart as incapable of consolation as they were of redress. Monster!—could no consideration of all this tender sorrow stay thy hands?—could no reflection

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upon so much bitter lamentation, throughout the coasts of Bethlehem, interpose and plead in behalf of so many wretched objects as this tragedy would make?—Was there no way open to ambition, but that thou must trample upon the affections of nature. Could no pity for the innocence of childhood,—no sympathy for the yearnings of parental love, incline thee to some other measures for thy security,—but thou must thus pitilessly rush in,—take the victim by violence,—tear it from the embraces of the mother,—offer it up before her eyes,—leave her disconsolate for ever,—broken-hearted with a loss,—so affecting in itself,—so circumstanced with horror, that no time, how friendly soever to the mournful,—should ever be able to wear out the impression?

There is nothing in which the mind of man is more divided, than in accounts of this horrid nature.—For when we consider man as fashioned by his Maker,—innocent and upright,—full of the tenderest dispositions,—with a heart inclining him to kindness, and the love and protection of his species,—this idea of him would almost shake the credit of such accounts:—so that to clear them,—we are forced to take a second view of man,—very different from this favourable one, in which we insensibly represent him to our imaginations;—that is, we are obliged to consider him,—not as he was made, but as he is;—a creature by the violence and irregularity of his passions, capable of being perverted from all these friendly and benevolent propensities, and sometimes hurried into excesses so opposite to them, as to render the most unnatural and horrid accounts of what he does but too probable.—The truth of this observation will be exemplified in the case before us. For next to the faith and character of the historian who reports such facts,—the particular cha-

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racter of the person who committed them, is to be considered as a voucher for their truth and credibility; —and if, upon enquiry, it appears, that the man acted but consistent with himself,—and just so you would have expected from his principles,—the credit of the historian is restored, and the fact related stands incontestable, from so strong and concurring an evidence on its side.

With this view, it may not be an unacceptable application of the remaining part of a discourse upon this day, to give you a sketch of the character of Herod,—not as drawn from Scripture,—for in general it furnishes us with few materials for such descriptions; —the sacred Scripture cuts off in few words the history of the ungodly, how great soever they were in the eyes of the world;—and, on the other hand, dwells largely upon the smallest actions of the righteous.—We find all the circumstances of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, recorded in the minutest manner.— The wicked seem only mentioned with regret; just brought upon the stage, on purpose to be condemned. The use and advantage of which conduct—is, I suppose, the reason, — as in general it enlarges on no character but what is worthy of imitation. 'Tis however undeniable, that the lives of bad men are not without use;—and whenever such a one is drawn, not with a corrupt view to be admired,—but on purpose to be detested,—it must excite such a horror against vice, as will strike indirectly the same good impression. And though it is painful in the last degree to paint a man in the shades which his vices have cast upon him, —yet when it serves this end, and at the same time illustrates a point in sacred history,—it carries its own excuse with it.

This Herod, therefore, of whom the evangelist speaks,

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if you take a superficial view of his life, you would say was a compound of good and evil;—that though he was certainly a bad man,—yet you would think the mass was tempered at the same time with a mixture of good qualities; so that in course, as is not uncommon, he would appear with two characters,—very different from each other. If you looked on the more favourable side, you would see a man of great address,—popular in his behaviour,—generous,—prince-like in his entertainments and expenses,—and, in a word, set off with all such virtues and showy properties, as bid high for the countenance and approbation of the world.

View him in another light, he was an ambitious, designing man,—suspicious of all the world,—rapacious,—implacable in his temper,—without sense of religion—or feeling of humanity. Now, in all such complex characters as this,—the way the world usually judges is, to sum up the good and the bad against each other,—deduct the lesser of these articles from the greater, and (as we do in passing other accounts) give credit to the man for what remains upon the balance. —Now, though this seems a fair, yet I fear it is often a fallacious reckoning,—which, though it may serve in many ordinary cases of private life, yet will not hold good in the more notorious instances of men's lives, especially when so complicated with good and bad as to exceed all common bounds and proportions.—Not to be deceived in such cases, we must work by a different rule; which, though it may appear less candid, yet, to make amends, I am persuaded, will bring us in general much nearer to the thing we want,—which is truth: the way to this is, in all judgments of this kind, to distinguish and carry in your eye the principal and ruling passion which leads the character,—and separate that from the other parts of it;—and then take notice,

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how far his other qualities, good and bad, are brought to serve and support that. For want of this distinction, we often think ourselves inconsistent creatures when we are the farthest from it; and all the variety of shapes and contradictory appearances we put on, are in truth but so many different attempts to gratify the same governing appetite.

With this clew, let us endeavour to unravel this character of Herod as here given.

The first thing which strikes one in it, is Ambition, —an immoderate thirst, as well as jealousy, of power. —How inconsistent soever in other parts, his character appears invariable in this,—and every action of his life was true to it.—From hence we may venture to conclude, that this was *his* ruling passion;—and that most, if not all the other wheels, were put in motion by this first spring. Now let us consider how far this was the case in fact.

To begin with the worst part of him,—I said he was a man of no sense of religion, or at least no other sense of it but that which served his turn; — for he is recorded to have built temples in Judea, and erected images in them for idolatrous worship,—not from a persuasion of doing right, for he was bred a Jew, and consequently taught to abhor all idolatry;—but he was in truth sacrificing all this time to a greater idol of his own,—his ruling passion; for, if we may trust Josephus, his sole view in so gross a compliance was to ingratiate himself with Augustus and the great men of Rome, from whom he held his power.—With this he was greedy and rapacious.—How could he be otherwise, with so devouring an appetite as ambition to provide for?—He was jealous in his nature, and suspicious of all the world.—Shew me an ambitious man that is not so; for as such a man's hand, like Ishmael's, is against

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every man,—he concludes, that every man's hand in course is against him.

Few men were ever guilty of more astonishing acts of cruelty;—and yet the particular instances of them in Herod were such as he was hurried into by the alarms this waking passion perpetually gave him. He put the whole Sanhedrim to the sword,—sparing neither age, wisdom, nor merit!—one cannot suppose simply from an inclination to cruelty:—no;—they had opposed the establishment of his power at Jerusalem.

His own sons, two hopeful youths, he cut off by a public execution!—The worst men have natural affection;—and such a stroke as this would run so contrary to the natural workings of it, that you are forced to suppose the impulse of some more violent inclination to over-rule and conquer it.—And so it was; for the Jewish historian tells us, 'twas jealousy of power, his darling object,—of which he feared they would one day or other dispossess him:—sufficient inducement to transport a man of such a temper into the bloodiest excesses.

Thus far this one fatal and extravagant passion accounts for the dark side of Herod's character. This governing principle being first laid open,—all his other bad actions follow in course, like so many symptomatic complaints from the same distemper.

Let us see if this was not the case even of his virtues too.

At first sight it seems a mystery how a man—so black as Herod has been thus far described—should be able to support himself in the favour and friendship of so wise and penetrating a body of men as the Roman senate, of whom he held his power! To counterbalance the weight of so bad and detested a character,—and be able to bear it up as Herod did, one would think he

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must have been master of some great secret, worth enquiring after. He was so. But that secret was no other than what appears on this reverse of his character.—He was a person of great address;—popular in his outward behaviour:—he was generous; prince-like in his entertainments and expenses. The world was then as corrupt, at least, as now,—and Herod understood it; knew at what price it was to be bought,—and what qualities would bid the highest for its good word and approbation.

And, in truth, he judged this matter so well,—that, notwithstanding the general odium and prepossession which arose against so hateful a character,—in spite of all the impressions from so many repeated complaints of his cruelties and oppressions,—he yet stemmed the torrent,—and, by the specious display of these popular virtues, bore himself up against it all his life:—so that, at length, when he was summoned to Rome to answer for his crimes,—Josephus tells us,—that, by the mere magnificence of his expenses, and the apparent generosity of his behaviour, he entirely confuted the whole charge;—and so ingratiated himself with the Roman senate, and won the heart of Augustus (as he had that of Anthony before), that he ever after had his favour and kindness:—which I cannot mention without adding, that it is an eternal stain upon the character and memory of Augustus, that he sold his countenance and protection to so bad a man, for so mean and base a consideration.

From this point of view, if we look back upon Herod,—his best qualities will shrink into little room; and how glittering soever in appearance, when brought to this balance, are found wanting. And in truth, if we would not willingly be deceived, in the value of any virtue or set of virtues in so complex a cha-

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racter,—we must call them to this very account; examine whom they serve, what passion and what principle they have for their master. When this is understood, the whole clue is unravelled at once; and the character of Herod, as complicated as it is given us in history,—when thus analysed, is summed up in three words,—'That he was a man of unbounded ambition, who stuck at nothing to gratify it;'—so that not only his vices were ministerial to his ruling passion, but his virtues too (if they deserve the name) were drawn in, and listed into the same service.

Thus much for the character of Herod;—the critical review of which has many obvious uses, to which I may trust you, having time but to mention that particular one which first led me into this examination;—namely, That all objections against the evangelist's account of this day's slaughter of the Bethlehemitish infants,—from the incredibility of so horrid an account,—are silenced by this account of the man; since, in this, he acted but like himself, and just so as you would expect in the same circumstances from every man of so ambitious a head—and so bad a heart. Consider, what havoc ambition has made!—how often the same tragedy has been acted upon larger theatres,—where not only the innocence of childhood,—or the grey hairs of the aged, have found no protection,—but whole countries, without distinction, have been put to the sword! or, what is as cruel, have been driven forth to nakedness and famine, to make way for new ones, under the guidance of this passion.—For a specimen of this, reflect upon the story related by Plutarch; when, by the order of the Roman senate, populous cities were unawares sacked and destroyed, at one prefixed hour, by P. Æmilius; by whom one hundred and fifty thousand unhappy people

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were driven in one day into captivity,—to be sold to the highest bidder,—to end their days in cruel labour and anguish! As astonishing as the account before us is, it vanishes into nothing from such views; since it is plain, from all history, that there is no wickedness too great for so unbounded a cause,—and that the most horrid accounts in history are, as I said above, but too probable effects of it.

May God of his mercy defend mankind from future experiments of this kind!—and grant we may make a proper use of them, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

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SERMON X.

JOB'S ACCOUNT OF THE SHORTNESS AND TROUBLES OF LIFE CONSIDERED.

JOB, xiv. 1, 2.

Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble;—He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

THERE is something in this reflection of holy Job's, upon the shortness of life and instability of human affairs, so beautiful and truly sublime, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity to produce a specimen of eloquence so noble and truly affecting. Whether this effect be owing in some measure to the pathetic nature of the subject reflected on; or to the eastern manner of expression, in a style more exalted and suitable to so great a subject; or, which is the more likely account, because they are properly the words of that Being who first inspired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter; who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the tongue of the infant eloquent:—to which of these we are to refer the beauty and sublimity of this, as well as that of numberless other passages in holy writ, may not seem now material; but surely, without these helps never man was better qualified to make just and noble reflections upon the shortness of life and instability of human affairs, than Job was, who had himself waded through such a sea of troubles, and in his passage had

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encountered many vicissitudes of storms and sunshine, and by turns had felt both the extremes of all the happiness and all the wretchedness that mortal man is heir to.

The beginning of his days was crowned with every thing that ambition could wish for;—he was the greatest of all the men of the east,—had large and unbounded possessions, and no doubt enjoyed all the comforts and advantages of life which they could administer.—Perhaps you will say a wise man might not be inclined to give a full loose to this kind of happiness, without some better security for the support of it than the mere possession of such goods of fortune, which often slip from under us, and sometimes unaccountably make themselves wings and fly away.—But he had that security too;—for the hand of Providence which had thus far protected, was still leading him forwards, and seemed engaged in the preservation and continuance of these blessings.—God had set a hedge about him, and about all that he had on every side; he had blessed all the works of his hands, and his substance increased every day. Indeed even with this security, riches to him that hath neither child nor brother, as the wise man observes, instead of a comfort, prove sometimes a sore travail and vexation.—The mind of man is not always satisfied with the reasonable assurance of its own enjoyments, but will look forwards, as if it discovers some imaginary void; the want of some beloved object to fill his place after him, will often disquiet itself in vain, and say, 'For whom 'do I labour, and bereave myself of rest?'

This bar to his happiness God had likewise taken away, in blessing him with a numerous offspring of sons and daughters, the apparent inheritors of all his present happiness.—Pleasing reflection! to think the

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blessings God has indulged one's self in, shall be handed and continued down to a man's own seed! how little does this differ from a second enjoyment of them to an affectionate parent, who naturally looks forward with as strong an interest upon his children as if he was to live over again in his own posterity!

What could be wanting to finish such a picture of a happy man? Surely nothing, except a virtuous disposition to give a relish to these blessings, and direct him to make a proper use of them.—He had that too; for he was a perfect and upright man; one that feared God and eschewed evil.

In the midst of all this prosperity, which was as great as could well fall to the share of one man;—whilst all the world looked gay, and smiled upon him, and every thing round him seemed to promise, if possible, an increase of happiness,—in one instant all is changed to sorrow and utter despair!

It pleased God, for wise purposes, to blast the fortunes of his house, and cut off the hopes of his posterity, and, in one mournful day, to bring this great prince from his palace down to the dunghill. His flocks and herds, in which consisted the abundance of his wealth, were part consumed by a fire from heaven; the remainder taken away by the sword of the enemy: his sons and daughters, whom 'tis natural to imagine so good a man had so brought up in a sense of their duty, as to give him all reasonable hopes of much joy and pleasure in their future lives,—natural prospect for a parent to look forwards at, to recompense him for the many cares and anxieties which their infancy had cost him! these dear pledges of his future happiness were all, all snatched from him at one blow, just at the time that one might imagine they were beginning to be the comfort and delight of his old age, which most wanted

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such staves to lean on;—and as circumstances add to an evil, so they did to this;—for it fell out, not only by a very calamitous accident, which was grievous enough in itself, but likewise upon the back of his other misfortunes, when he was ill prepared to bear such a shock; and what would still add to it, it happened at an hour when he had least reason to expect it, when he would naturally think his children secure and out of the way of danger:—'For whilst they were feasting 'and making merry in their eldest brother's house, a 'great wind out of the wilderness smote the four 'corners of the house, and it fell upon them.'

Such a concurrence of misfortunes is not the common lot of many; and yet there are instances of some who have undergone as severe trials, and bravely struggled under them; perhaps by natural force of spirits, the advantages of health, and the cordial assistance of a friend. And with these helps, what may not a man sustain?—But this was not Job's case; for scarce had these evils fallen upon him, when he was not only borne down with a grievous distemper which afflicted him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, but likewise his three friends, in whose kind consolations he might have found a medicine,—even the wife of his bosom, whose duty it was with a gentle hand to have softened all his sorrows,—instead of doing this, they cruelly insulted and became the reproachers of his integrity!—O God! what is man when thou bruisest him, and makest his burden heavier as his strength grows less!—Who, that had found himself thus an example of the many changes and chances of this mortal life,—when he considered himself now stripped and left destitute of so many valuable blessings which the moment before thy providence had poured upon his head,—when he reflected upon this gay delightsome

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structure, in appearance so strongly built, so pleasingly surrounded with every thing that could flatter his hopes and wishes, and beheld it all levelled with the ground in one moment, and the whole prospect vanish with it, like the description of an enchantment,—who I say that had seen and felt the shock of so sudden a revolution, would not have been furnished with just and beautiful reflections upon the occasion, and said with Job in the words of the text, that 'Man that is born of 'a woman, is of few days, and full of misery;—that 'he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he 'fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not!'

The words of the text are an epitome of the natural and moral vanity of man; and contain two distinct declarations concerning his state and condition in each respect.

First, that he is a creature of few days; and secondly, That those days are full of trouble.

I shall make some reflections upon each of these in their order, and conclude with a practical lesson from the whole.

And first, That he is of few days. The comparison which Job makes use of, 'That man cometh forth like 'a flower,' is extremely beautiful, and more to the purpose than the most elaborate proof, which in truth the subject will not easily admit of;—the shortness of life being a point so generally complained of in all ages since the flood, and so universally felt and acknowledged by the whole species, as to require no evidence beyond a similitude; the intent of which is not so much to prove the fact, as to illustrate and place it in such a light as to strike us, and bring the impression home to ourselves in a more affecting manner.

Man comes forth, says Job, like a flower, and is

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cut down;—he is sent into the world the fairest and noblest part of God's works,—fashioned after the image of his Creator with respect to reason and the great faculties of the mind; he cometh forth glorious as the flower of the field: as it surpasses the vegetable world in beauty, so does he the animal world in the glory and excellencies of his nature.

The one,—if no untimely accident oppress it, soon arrives at the full period of its perfection,—is suffered to triumph for a few moments, and is plucked up by the roots in the very pride and gayest stage of its being:—or, if it happens to escape the hands of violence, in a few days it necessarily sickens of itself and dies away.

Man likewise, though his progress is slower, and his duration something longer, yet the periods of his growth and declension are nearly the same, both in the nature and manner of them.

If he escapes the dangers which threaten his tender years, he is soon got into the full maturity and strength of life; and if he is so fortunate as not to be hurried out of it then by accidents, by his own folly and intemperance,—if he escapes these, he naturally decays of himself;—a period comes fast upon him, beyond which he was not made to last.——Like a flower or fruit which may be plucked up by force before the time of their maturity, yet cannot be made to outgrow the period when they are to fade and drop of themselves; when that comes, the hand of nature then plucks them both off, and no art of the botanist can uphold the one, or skill of the physician preserve the other, beyond the periods to which their original frames and constitutions were made to extend. As God has appointed and determined the several growths and decays of the vegetable race, so he seems as evidently

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to have prescribed the same laws to man, as well as all living creatures, in the first rudiments of which there are contained the specific powers of their growth, duration, and extinction; and when the evolutions of those animal powers are exhausted and run down, the creature expires and dies of itself, as ripe fruit falls from the tree, or a flower preserved beyond its bloom drops and perishes upon the stalk.

Thus much for this comparison of Job's, which, though it is very poetical, yet conveys a just idea of the thing referred to.——'That he fleeth also as a 'shadow, and continueth not,'—is no less a faithful and fine representation of the shortness and vanity of human life; of which one cannot give a better explanation, than by referring to the original, from whence the picture was taken.—With how quick a succession do days, months, and years pass over our heads!—how truly like a shadow that departeth, do they flee away insensibly, and scarce leave an impression with us!——When we endeavour to call them back by reflection, and consider in what manner they have gone, how unable are the best of us to give a tolerable account!—and were it not for some of the more remarkable stages which have distinguished a few periods of this rapid progress,—we should look back upon it all as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his dream when he awoke in the morning:—he was sensible many things had passed, and troubled him too, but had passed on so quickly, they had left no footsteps behind, by which he could be enabled to trace them back!——Melancholy account of the life of man! which generally runs on in such a manner, as scarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone!

How many of our first years slide by in the innocent

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sports of childhood, in which we are not able to make reflections upon them!—how many more thoughtless years escape us in our youth, when we are unwilling to do it, and are so eager in the pursuit of pleasure, as to have no time to spare, to stop and consider them!

When graver and riper years come on, and we begin to think it time to reform and set up for men of sense and conduct, then the business and perplexing interests of this world, and the endless plotting and contriving how to make the most of it, do so wholly employ us, that we are too busy to make reflections upon so unprofitable a subject.—As families and children increase, so do our affections, and with them are multiplied our cares and toils for their preservation and establishment;—all which take up our thoughts so closely, and possess them so long, that we are often overtaken by grey hairs before we see them, or have found leisure to consider how far we were got,—what we have been doing,—and for what purpose God sent us into the world! As man may justly be said to be of few days, considered with respect to this hasty succession of things, which soon carries him into the decline of his life,—so may he likewise be said to flee like a shadow and continue not, when his duration is compared with other parts of God's works, and even the works of his own hands, which outlast him many generations;—whilst (as Homer observes) like leaves, one generation drops—and another springs up,—to fall again and be forgotten.

But when we farther consider his days in the light in which we ought chiefly to view them, as they appear in thy sight, O God! with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday; when we reflect that this hand-breadth of life is all that is measured out to man from

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that eternity for which he is created, how does his short span vanish to nothing in the comparison! 'Tis true, the greatest portion of time will do the same when compared with what is to come; and therefore so short and transitory a one as three-score years and ten, beyond which all is declared to be labour and sorrow, may the easier be allowed: and yet how uncertain are we of that portion, short as it is! Do not ten thousand accidents break off the slender thread of human life, long before it can be drawn out to that extent?—The new-born babe falls down an easy prey, and moulders back again into dust, like a tender blossom put forth in an untimely hour. The hopeful youth in the very pride and beauty of his life is cut off; some cruel distemper or unthought-of accident lays him prostrate upon the earth (to pursue Job's comparison), like a blooming flower, smit and shrivelled up with a malignant blast. In this stage of life, chances multiply upon us,—the seeds of disorder are sown by intemperance or neglect,—infectious distempers are more easily contracted; when contracted, they rage with greater violence, and the success in many cases is more doubtful, insomuch that they who have exercised themselves in computations of this kind, tell us, 'That one half of the whole species which are 'born into the world, go out of it again, and are all 'dead in so short a space as the first seventeen years.'

These reflections may be sufficient to illustrate the first part of Job's declaration, 'That man is of few 'days.' Let us examine the truth of the other, and see whether he is not likewise full of trouble.

And here we must not take our account from the flattering outside of things, which are generally set off with a glittering appearance enough, especially in what is called Higher Life. Nor can we safely trust the

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evidence of some of the more merry and thoughtless amongst us, who are so set upon the enjoyment of life, as seldom to reflect on the troubles of it;—or who perhaps, because they are not yet come to this portion of their inheritance, imagine it is not their common lot. —Nor, lastly, are we to form an idea of it from the delusive stories of a few of the most prosperous passengers, who have fortunately sailed through and escaped the rougher toils and distresses;—but we are to take our account from a close survey of human life, and the real face of things, stript of every thing that can palliate or gild it over. We must hear the general complaint of all ages, and read the histories of mankind. If we look into them, and examine them to the bottom, what do they contain, but the history of sad and uncomfortable passages, which a good-natured man cannot read but with oppression of spirits!—Consider the dreadful succession of wars in one part or other of the earth, perpetuated from one century to another with so little intermission, that mankind have scarce had time to breathe from them, since ambition first came into the world! consider the horrid effects of them in all those barbarous devastations we read of, where whole nations have been put to the sword, or have been driven out to nakedness and famine, to make room for newcomers! Consider how great a part of our species, in all ages down to this, have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries nor pity their distresses!—Consider slavery,—what it is,—how bitter a draught, and how many millions have been made to drink it!—which, if it can poison all earthly happiness, when exercised barely upon our bodies, what must it be when it comprehends both the slavery of body and mind!—To conceive this, look into the

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history of the Romish church and her tyrants, or rather executioners, who seem to have taken pleasure in the pangs and convulsions of their fellow-creatures!—Examine the Inquisition; hear the melancholy notes sounded in every cell!—Consider the anguish of mock trials, and the exquisite tortures consequent thereupon, mercilessly inflicted upon the unfortunate, where the racked and weary soul has so often wished to take its leave,—but cruelly not suffered to depart!—Consider how many of these helpless wretches have been hauled from thence, in all periods of this tyrannic usurpation, to undergo the massacres and flames to which a false and a bloody religion has condemned them!

If this sad history and detail of the more public causes of the miseries of man are not sufficient, let us behold him in another light, with respect to the more private causes of them, and see whether he is not full of trouble likewise there, and almost born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards. If we consider man as a creature full of wants and necessities, whether real or imaginary, which he is not able to supply of himself,—what a train of disappointments, vexations, and dependencies are to be seen issuing from thence, to perplex and make his being uneasy!—How many jostlings and hard struggles do we undergo, in making our way in the world!—How barbarously held back! How often and basely overthrown, in aiming only at getting bread!—How many of us never attain it, at least not comfortably, but, from various and unknown causes,—eat it all our lives long in bitterness!

If we shift the scene and look upwards, towards those whose situation in life seems to place them above the sorrows of this kind, yet where are they exempt from others? Do not all ranks and conditions of men meet with sad accidents and numberless calamities in

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other respects, which often make them go heavily all their lives long?

How many fall into chronical infirmities which render both their days and nights restless and insupportable!—How many of the highest rank are torn up with ambition, or soured with disappointments! and how many more, from a thousand secret causes of disquiet, pine away in silence, and owe their deaths to sorrow and dejection of heart!—If we cast our eyes upon the lowest class and condition of life,—the scene is more melancholy still.—Millions of our fellow-creatures born to no inheritance but poverty and trouble, forced by the necessity of their lots to drudgery and painful employments, and hard set with that too, to get enough to keep themselves and families alive!—so that upon the whole, when we have examined the true state and condition of human life, and have made some allowances for a few fugacious, deceitful pleasures, there is scarce any thing to be found which contradicts Job's description of it.—Whichever way we look abroad, we see some legible characters of what God first denounced against us, 'That in sorrow we should eat 'our bread, till we return to the ground from whence 'we were taken.'*

But some one will say, Why are we thus to be put out of love with human life? To what purpose is it to expose the dark sides of it to us, or enlarge upon the infirmities which are natural and consequently out of our power to redress?

I answer, That the subject is nevertheless of great importance, since it is necessary every creature should

* Most of these reflections upon the miseries of life are taken from Woollaston.

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understand his present state and condition, to put him in mind of behaving suitably to it.—Does not an impartial survey of man,—the holding up of this glass to shew him his defects and natural infirmities, naturally tend to cure his pride, and clothe him with humility? which is a dress that best becomes a short-lived and a wretched creature. —Does not the consideration of the shortness of our life, convince us of the wisdom of dedicating so small a portion to the great purposes of eternity?

Lastly, When we reflect that this span of life, short as it is, is chequered with so many troubles, that there is nothing in this world springs up or can be enjoyed without a mixture of sorrow, how insensibly does it incline us to turn our eyes and affections from so gloomy a prospect, and fix them upon that happier country, where afflictions cannot follow us, and where God will wipe away all tears from off our faces for ever and ever! Amen.

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SERMON XI.

EVIL-SPEAKING.

JAMES, i. 26.

If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.

OF the many duties owing both to God and our neighbour, there are scarce any men so bad as not to acquit themselves of some; and few so good, I fear, as to practise all.

Every man seems willing enough to compound the matter, and adopt so much of the system as will least interfere with his principal and ruling passion; and for those parts which would occasion a more troublesome opposition, to consider them as hard sayings, and so leave them for those to practise, whose natural tempers are better suited to the struggle; so that a man should be covetous, oppressive, revengeful, neither a lover of truth nor common honesty, and yet at the same time shall be *very* religious, and so sanctified, as not once to fail of paying his morning and evening sacrifice to God. So, on the other hand, a man shall live without God in the world, have neither any great sense of religion, nor, indeed, pretend to have any, and yet be of nicest honour, conscientiously just and fair in all his dealings. And here it is that men generally betray themselves, deceiving, as the apostle says, their own hearts; of which the instances are so various, in one

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degree or other, throughout human life, that one might safely say, the bulk of mankind live in such a contradiction to themselves, that there is no character so hard to be met with as one which, upon a critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and in every point consistent with itself.

If such a contrast was only observable in the different stages of a man's life, it would cease to be either a matter of wonder or of just reproach. Age, experience, and much reflection, may naturally enough be supposed to alter a man's sense of things, and so entirely to transform him, that not only in outward appearances, but in the very cast and turn of his mind, he may be as unlike and different from the man he was twenty or thirty years ago, as he ever was from anything of his own species. This, I say, is naturally to be accounted for, and in some cases might be praise-worthy too; but the observation is to be made of men in the same period of their lives, that in the same day, sometimes in the very same action, they are utterly inconsistent and irreconcileable with themselves.—Look at a man in one light, and he shall seem wise, penetrating, discreet, and brave; behold him in another point of view, and you see a creature all over folly and indiscretion, weak and timorous as cowardice and indiscretion can make him. A man shall appear gentle, courteous, and benevolent to all mankind: follow him into his own house, may be you see a tyrant, morose and savage to all whose happiness depends upon his kindness. A third in his general behaviour is found to be generous, disinterested, humane, and friendly:—hear but the sad story of the friendless orphans, too credulously trusting all their little substance into his hands, and he shall appear more sordid, more pitiless

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and unjust than the injured themselves have bitterness to paint him. Another shall be charitable to the poor, uncharitable in his censures and opinions of all the rest of the world besides;—temperate in his appetites, intemperate in his tongue: shall have too much conscience and religion to cheat the man who trusts him, and, perhaps, as far as the business of debtor and creditor extends, shall be just and scrupulous to the uttermost mite; yet, in matters of full as great concern, where he is to have the handling of the party's reputation and good name—the dearest, the tenderest property a man has, he will do him irreparable damage, and rob him there without measure or pity.

And this seems to be that particular piece of inconsistency and contradiction which the text is levelled at, in which the words seem so pointed, as if St. James had known more flagrant instances of this kind of delusion than what had fallen under the observation of any of the rest of the apostles; he being more remarkably vehement and copious upon that subject than any other.

Doubtless, some of his converts had been notoriously wicked and licentious in this remorseless practice of defamation and evil-speaking. Perhaps the holy man, though spotless as an angel, (for no character is too sacred for calumny to blacken) had grievously suffered himself, and, as his blessed Master foretold him, had been cruelly reviled and evil *spoken* of.

All his labours in the gospel, his unaffected and perpetual solicitude for the preservation of his flock, his watchings and fastings, his poverty, his natural simplicity and innocence of life, all perhaps were not enough to defend him from this unruly weapon, so full of deadly poison:—and what, in all likelihood, might move his sorrow and indignation more, some

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who seemed the most devout and zealous of all his converts, were the most merciless and uncharitable in that respect; having a form of godliness, full of bitter envyings and strife.

With such it is that he expostulates so largely in the third chapter of his epistle: and there is something in his vivacity tempered with such affection and concern, as well suited the character of an inspired man. My brethren, says the apostle, these things ought not to be.—The wisdom that is from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy.—The wisdom from above,—that heavenly religion which I have preached to you, is pure, alike, and consistent with itself in all its parts; like its great Author, 'tis universally kind and benevolent in all cases and circumstances. Its first glad tidings were peace upon earth, goodwill towards men; its chief corner-stone, its most distinguishing character, is Love,—that kind principle which brought it down, in the pure exercise of which consists the chief enjoyment of heaven, from whence it came. But this practice, my brethren, cometh not from above, but it is earthly, sensual, devilish, full of confusion and every evil work. Reflect then a moment:—Can a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine, figs? Lay your hands upon your hearts, and let your consciences speak. — Ought not the same just principle, which restrains you from cruelty and wrong in one case, equally to withhold you from it in another? —Should not charity and good-will, like the principle of life, circulating through the smallest vessels in every member, ought it not to operate as regularly upon you throughout, as well upon your words as upon your actions?

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If a man is wise and endued with knowledge, let him shew it out of a good conversation, with meekness of wisdom. But,—if any man amongst you seemeth to be religious—(seemeth to be,—for truly religious he cannot be) — and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. —This is the full force of St. James's reasoning, upon which I have dwelt the more, it being the foundation upon which is grounded this clear decision of the matter left us in the text: — in which the apostle seems to have set the two characters of a saint and a slanderer at such variance, that one would have thought they could never have had a heart to have met together again. But there are no alliances too strange for this world.—How many may we observe every day, even of the gentler sex as well as our own, who, without conviction of doing much wrong, in the midst of a full career of calumny and defamation, rise up punctual at the stated hour of prayer, leave the cruel story half untold till they return;— go,—and kneel down before the throne of Heaven, thank God that he had not made them like others, and that his Holy Spirit had enabled them to perform the duties of the day in so Christian and conscientious a manner.

This delusive itch for slander, too common in all ranks of people, whether to gratify a little ungenerous resentment; — whether oftener out of a principle of levelling, from a narrowness and poverty of soul, ever impatient of merit and superiority in others;— whether from a mean ambition, or the insatiate lust of being witty (a talent in which ill-nature and malice are no ingredients);—or lastly, whether from a natural cruelty of disposition, abstracted from all views and considerations of self:—to which one, or whether to

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all jointly, we are indebted for this contagious malady, thus much is certain, from whatever seeds it springs, the growth and progress of it are as destructive to as they are unbecoming a civilized people. To pass a hard and ill-natured reflection upon an undesigning action;—to invent, or, which is equally bad, to propagate a vexatious report without colour and grounds;—to plunder an innocent man of his character and good name, a jewel which, perhaps, he has starved himself to purchase, and probably would hazard his life to secure;—to rob him at the same time of his happiness and peace of mind, perhaps his bread,—the bread, may be, of a virtuous family; and all this, as Solomon says of the madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, and saith, Am I not in sport? all this out of wantonness, and oftener from worse motives,—the whole appears such a complication of badness, as requires no words or warmth of fancy to aggravate. Pride, treachery, envy, hypocrisy, malice, cruelty, and self-love, may have been said, in one shape or other, to have occasioned all the frauds and mischiefs that ever happened in the world; but the chances against a coincidence of them all in one person are so many, that one would have supposed the character of a common slanderer as rare and difficult a production in nature as that of a great genius, which seldom happens above once in an age.

But whatever was the case when St. James wrote his epistle, we have been very successful in later days, and we have found out the art, by a proper management of light and shade, to compound all these vices together, so as to give body and strength to the whole, whilst no one but a discerning artist is able to discover the labours that join in finishing the picture;—and, indeed, like many other bad originals in the world,—

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it stands in need of all the disguise it has.—For who could be enamoured of a character made up of so loathsome a compound,—could they behold it naked, —in its crooked and deformed shape,—with all its natural and detested infirmities laid open to public view?

And, therefore, it were to be wished, that one would do in this malignant case of the mind,—what is generally done for the public good in the more malignant and epidemical cases of the body;—that is,—When they are found infectious,—to write a history of the distemper,—and ascertain all the symptoms of the malady, so that every one might know whom he might venture to go near, with tolerable safety to himself.—But, alas! the symptoms of this appear in so many strange and contradictory shapes, and vary so wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be classed,—nor reduced to any one regular system.

Ten thousand are the vehicles in which this deadly poison is prepared and communicated to the world;—and, by some artful hands, 'tis done by so subtle and nice an infusion, that it is not to be tasted or discovered, but by its effects.

How frequently is the honesty and integrity of a man disposed of by a smile or a shrug!—How many good and generous actions have been sunk into oblivion by a distrustful look!—or stamped with the imputation of proceeding from bad motives, by a mysterious and seasonable whisper!

Look into companies of those whose gentle natures should disarm them,—we shall find no better account. —How large a portion of chastity is sent out of the world by distant hints,—nodded away, and cruelly winked into suspicion by the envy of those who are

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past all temptation of it themselves!—How often does the reputation of a helpless creature bleed by report,—which the party who is at the pains to propagate it, beholds with much pity and fellow-feeling!—that she is heartily sorry for it,—hopes in God it is not true!—however, as Archbishop Tillotson wittily observes upon it, is resolved, in the mean time, to give the report her pass, that at least it may have fair play to take its fortune in the world,—to be believed or not, according to the charity of those into whose hands it shall happen to fall.

So fruitful is this vice in a variety of experiments, to satiate as well as disguise itself. But if these smoother weapons cut so sore,—what shall we say of open and unblushing scandal,—subjected to no caution, tied down to no restraints?—If the one, like an arrow shot in the dark, does nevertheless so much secret mischief,—this, like the pestilence which rageth at noonday, sweeps all before it, levelling without distinction the good and the bad; a thousand fall beside it, and ten thousand on its right hand; they fall,—so rent and torn in this tender part of them, so unmercifully butchered, as sometimes never to recover either the wounds or the anguish of heart which they have occasioned.

But there is nothing so bad which will not admit of something to be said in its defence.

And here it may be asked,—Whether the inconveniences and ill effects which the world feels from the licentiousness of this practice, are not sufficiently counterbalanced by the influence it has on men's lives and conduct?—That if there was no evil-speaking in the world, thousands would be encouraged to do ill,—and would rush into many indecorums, like a horse into the battle, were they sure to escape the tongues of men.

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That if we take a general view of the world,—we shall find that a great deal of virtue,—at least of the outward appearance of it,—is not so much for any fixed principle, as the terror of what the world will say,—and the liberty it will take upon the occasions we shall give.

That, if we descend to particulars, numbers are every day taking more pains to be well spoken of,—than would actually enable them to live so as to deserve it.

That there are many of both sexes who can support life well enough without honour and chastity,—who, without reputation, (which is but the opinion which the world has of the matter) would hide their heads in shame, and sink down in utter despair of happiness.—No doubt the tongue is a weapon which does chastise many indecorums, which the laws of men will not reach;—and keeps many in awe,—whom conscience will not;—and where the case is indisputably flagrant,—the speaking of it in such words as it deserves,—scarce comes within the prohibition.—In many cases, 'tis hard to express ourselves so as to fix a distinction betwixt opposite characters;—and sometimes it may be as much a debt we owe to virtue, and as great a piece of justice to expose a vicious character, and paint it in its proper colours,—as it is to speak well of the deserving, and describe its particular virtues.—And, indeed, when we inflict this punishment upon the bad, merely out of principle, and without indulgence to any private passion of our own,—'tis a case which happens so seldom, that one might venture to except it.

However, to those who in this objection are really concerned for the cause of virtue, I cannot help recommending what would much more effectually serve her interest, and be a surer token of their zeal and attach-

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ment to her; and that is,—in all such plain instances where it seems to be duty, to fix a distinction betwixt the good and the bad;—to let their actions speak it instead of their words, or at least to let them both speak one language. We all of us talk so loud against vicious characters, and are so unanimous in our cry against them,—that an unexperienced man, who only trusted his ears, would imagine the whole world was in an uproar about it,—and that mankind were all associating together, to hunt vice utterly out of the world.—Shift the scene,—and let him behold the reception which vice meets with;—he will see the conduct and behaviour of the world towards it, so opposite to their declarations:—he will find all he heard, so contradicted by what he saw,—as to leave him in doubt which of his senses he is to trust,—or in which of the two cases mankind were really in earnest. Was there virtue enough in the world to make a general stand against this contradiction;—that is, was every one who deserved to be ill spoken of,—sure to be ill looked upon too;—was it a certain consequence of the loss of a man's character,—to lose his friends,—to lose the advantages of his birth and fortune,—and thenceforth be universally shunned, universally slighted;—

Was no quality a shelter against the indecorums of the other sex, but was every woman without distinction who had justly forfeited her reputation,—from that moment was she sure to forfeit likewise all claim to civility and respect;—

Or, in a word, could it be established as a law in our ceremonial,—that wherever characters in either sex were become notorious,—it should be deemed infamous either to pay or receive a visit from them, and the door were to be shut against them in all public places, till they had satisfied the world by giving testimony of a

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better life,—a few such plain and honest maxims faithfully put in practice,—would force us upon some degree of reformation. Till this is done,—it avails little that we have no mercy upon them with our tongues, since they escape without feeling any other inconvenience.

We all cry out that the world is corrupt;—and I fear too justly:—but we never reflect what we have to thank for it, and that our open countenance of vice, which gives the lie to our private censures of it, is its chief protection and encouragement. To those, however, who still believe that evil-speaking is some terror to evil-doers, one may answer, as a great man has done upon the occasion,—That after all our exhortations against it,—'tis not to be feared, but that there will be evil-speaking enough left in the world to chastise the guilty;—and we may safely trust them to an ill-natured world, that there will be no failure of justice upon this score.—The passions of men are pretty severe executioners;—and to them let us leave this ungrateful task,—and rather ourselves endeavour to cultivate that more friendly one, recommended by the apostle,—of letting all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from us;—of being kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, forgave us. Amen.

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SERMON XII.

JOSEPH'S HISTORY CONSIDERED.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

GENESIS, L. 15.

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evils which we did unto him.

THERE are few instances of the exercise of particular virtues which seem harder to attain to, or which appear more amiable and engaging in themselves, than those of moderation and the forgiveness of injuries; and, when the temptations against them happen to be heightened by the bitterness of a provocation on the one hand, and the fairness of an opportunity to retaliate on the other, the instances *then* are truly great and heroic. The words of the text (which are the consultation of the sons of Jacob amongst themselves upon their father Israel's death, when, because it was in Joseph's power to revenge the deadly injury they had formerly done him, they concluded, in course, that it was in his intention)—will lead us to a beautiful example of this kind in the character and behaviour of Joseph consequent thereupon; and, as it seems a perfect and very engaging pattern of forbearance, it may not be improper to make it serve for the groundwork of a discourse upon that subject.——The whole transaction, from the first occasion given by Joseph in his youth, to this last of his remission, at the con-

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clusion of his life, may be said to be a master-piece of history. There is, not only in the manner throughout, such a happy, though uncommon, mixture of simplicity and grandeur,—which is a double character, so hard to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human;—but it is likewise related with the greatest variety of tender and affecting circumstances, which would afford matter for reflections useful for the conduct of almost every part and stage of a man's life. But as the words of the text, as well as the intention and compass of this discourse, particularly confine me to speak only to one point, namely, the forgiveness of injuries, it will be proper only to consider such circumstances of the story as will place this instance of it in its just light, and then proceed to make a more general use of the great example of moderation and forbearance which it sets before us.

It seems strange, at first sight, that, after the sons of Jacob had fallen into Joseph's power, when they were forced by the soreness of the famine to go down into Egypt to buy corn, and had found him too good a man even to expostulate with them for an injury, which he seemed then to have digested, and piously to have resolved into the over-ruling providence of God for the preservation of much people, how they could ever after question the uprightness of his intentiôns, or entertain the least suspicion that his reconciliation was dissembled. Would one have imagined that the man who had discovered such a goodness of soul that he sought where to weep, because he could not bear the struggles of a counterfeited harshness, could ever be suspected afterwards of intending a real one;—and that he only waited till their father Israel's death, to requite them all the evil which they had done unto him? What still adds to this difficulty is,

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that his affectionate manner in making himself known to them,—his goodness in forbearing not only to reproach them for the injury they had formerly done him, but extenuating and excusing the fault to themselves,—his comforting and speaking kindly to them, and seconding all with the tenderest marks of an undisguised forgiveness, in falling upon their necks and weeping aloud, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him;—that, moreover, this behaviour of Joseph could not appear to them to be the effect of any warm and sudden transport, which might as suddenly give way to other reflections, but that it evidently sprung from a settled principle of uncommon generosity in his nature, which was above the temptation of making use of an opportunity for revenge, which the course of God's providence had put into his hands for better purposes; and, what might still seem to confirm this, was the evidence of his actions to them afterwards, in bringing them and all their household up out of Canaan, and placing them near him in the land of Goschen, the richest part of Egypt, where they had had so many years experience of his love and kindness:—and yet it is plain that all this did not clear his motive from suspicion, or, at least, themselves of some apprehensions of a change in his conduct towards them. And was it not that the whole transaction was written under the direction of the Spirit of Truth, and that other historians concur in doing justice to Joseph's character, and speak of him as a compassionate and merciful man, one would be apt, you will say, to imagine here, that Moses might possibly have omitted some circumstances of Joseph's behaviour which had alarmed his brethren, betwixt the time of his first reconciliation and that of their father's death; for they could not be suspicious of his intentions without

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some cause; and fear where no fear was.—But does not a guilty conscience often do so,—and though it has the grounds, yet wants the power to think itself safe?

And could we look into the hearts of those who know they deserve ill, we should find many an instance, where a kindness from an injured hand, where there was least reason to expect one, has struck deeper, and touched the heart with a degree of remorse and concern, which, perhaps, no severity or resentment could have reached. This reflection will, in some measure, help to explain this difficulty which occurs in the story: for it is observable, that, when the injury they had done their brother was first committed, and the fact was fresh upon their minds and most likely to have filled them with a sense of guilt, we find no acknowledgment or complaint to one another of such a load as, one might imagine, it had laid upon them: and from that event, through a long course of years, to the time they had gone down to Egypt, we read not once of any sorrow or compunction of heart, which they had felt during all that time, for what they had done. They had artfully imposed upon their parent,—and (as men are ingenious casuists in their own affairs) they had, probably, as artfully imposed upon their own consciences;—and, possibly, had never impartially reflected upon the action, or considered it in its just light, till the many acts of their brother's love and kindness had brought it before them, with all the circumstances of aggravation which his behaviour would naturally give it:—they then began maturely to consider what they had done;—that they had at first undeservedly hated him in his childhood for that which, if it was a ground of complaint, ought rather to have been charged upon the indiscretion of the parent, than

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considered as a fault in him;—that, upon a more just examination and a better knowledge of their brother, they had wanted even that pretence. It was not a blind partiality which seemed first to have directed their father's affection to him, — though then they thought so;—for, doubtless, so much goodness and benevolence as shone forth in his nature, now that he was a man, could not lie all of it so deep concealed in his youth, but the sagacity of a parent's eye would discover it; and that, in course, their enmity towards him was founded upon that which ought to have won their esteem.—That, if he had incautiously added envy to their ill-will in reporting his dreams, which presaged his future greatness, it was but the indiscretion of a youth unpractised in the world, who had not yet found out the art of dissembling his hopes and expectations; and was scarce arrived at an age to comprehend there was such a thing in the world as envy and ambition;—that if such offences in a brother so fairly carried their own excuses with them, what could they say for themselves, when they considered it was for this they had almost unanimously conspired to rob him of his life; and, though they were happily restrained from shedding his blood upon Reuben's remonstrance, that they had, nevertheless, all the guilt of the intention to answer for? That whatever motive it was that then stayed their hands, their consciences told them it could not be a good one, since they had changed the sentence for one no less cruel in itself, and what, to an ingenuous nature, was worse than death, to be sold for a slave. The one was common to all,—the other only to the unfortunate. That it was not compassion which then took place; for, had there been any way open to that, his tears and entreaties must have found it, when they saw the anguish of his soul;—when he besought, and

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they would not hear. — That if aught still could heighten the remorse of banishing a youth, without provocation, for ever from his country and the protection of his parent to be exposed naked to the buffetings of the world and the rough hand of some merciless master, they would find it in this reflection, 'That the 'many afflictions and hardships, which they might 'naturally have expected would overtake the lad, con-'sequent upon this action, had actually fallen upon 'him.'

That, besides the anguish of suspected virtue, he had felt that of a prison, where he had long lain neglected in a friendless condition; and, where the affliction of it was rendered still sharper by the daily expectation of being remembered by Pharaoh's chief butler, and the disappointment of finding himself ungratefully forgotten.—And though Moses tells us, that he found favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, yet the Psalmist acquaints us that his sufferings were still grievous, 'That his feet were hurt with 'fetters,' and the iron entered 'even into his soul.' And, no doubt, his brethren thought the sense of their injury must have entered at the same time, and was then rivetted and fixed in his mind for ever.

It is natural to imagine they argued and reflected in this manner; and there seems no necessity of seeking for the reason of their uneasiness and distrust in Joseph's conduct, or any other external cause, since the inward workings of their own minds will easily account for the evil they apprehended.—A series of benefits and kindnesses from the man they had injured, gradually heightened the idea of their own guilt, till at length they could not conceive how the trespass could be forgiven them; it appeared with such fresh circumstances of aggravation, that, though they were con-

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vinced his resentment slept, yet they thought it only slept, and was likely, some time or other, to awake, and most probably then that their father was dead, when the consideration of involving him in his revenge had ceased, and all the duty and compassion he owed to the grey hairs and happiness of a parent was discharged and buried with him.

This they express in the consultation held amongst themselves in the words of the text; and, in the following verse, we find them accordingly sending to him to deprecate the evil they dreaded; and either because they thought their father's name more powerful than their own in this application,—or rather, that they might not commit a fresh injury in seeming to suspect his sincerity, they pretend their father's direction; for we read they sent messengers unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,—So shall ye say unto Joseph,—'Forgive, I 'pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren and their 'sin; for they did unto thee evil; and now, we pray 'thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God 'of thy father.' The address was not without art, and was conceived in such words as seemed to suggest an argument in their favour,—as if it would not become him, who was but a fellow-servant of their father's God, to harbour revenge, or use the power their father's God had given him against his children. Nor was there a reason in any thing but the fears of a guilty conscience to apprehend it, as appears from the reception the address met with, which was such as bespoke an uncommon goodness of nature; for when they thus spake unto him, the historian says he wept. Sympathy for the sorrow and distress of so many sons of his father, now all in his power,—pain at so open and ingenuous a confession of their guilt,—concern and

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pity for the long punishment they must have endured by so stubborn a remorse, which so many years seemed not to have diminished,—the affecting idea of their condition, which had seemed to reduce them to the necessity of holding up their hands for mercy, when they had lost their protector,—so many tender passions struggling together at once, overcame him;—he burst into tears; which spoke what no language could attempt. It will be needless, therefore, to enlarge any further upon this incident, which furnishes us with so beautiful a picture of a compassionate and forgiving temper, that, I think, no words can heighten it;—but, rather, let us endeavour to find out by what helps and reasoning the patriarch might be supposed to attain to so exalted and engaging a virtue. Perhaps, you will say, 'That one so thoroughly convinced, as Joseph 'seemed to be, of the over-ruling providence of God, 'which so evidently makes use of the malice and 'passions of men, and turns them as instruments in his 'hands to work his own righteousness, and bring about 'his eternal decrees,—and of which his own history 'was so plain an instance, could not have far to seek 'for an argument to forgiveness, or feel much struggle 'in stifling an inclination against it.'—But let any man lay his hand upon his heart, and say how often, in instances where anger and revenge had seized him, has this doctrine come in to his aid?—In the bitterness of an affront, how often has it calmed his passions, and checked the fury of his resentment!—True and universally believed as the doctrine is amongst us, it seldom does this service, though so well suited for it, and, like some wise statute never executed or thought of, though in full force, lies as unheeded as if it was not in being.

'Tis plain 'twas otherwise in the present instance, where Joseph seems to acknowledge the influence it

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had upon him in his declaration,—'*That* it was not 'they, but God who sent him.'* And does not this virtue shine the brightest in such a pious application of the permission to do so benevolent a purpose?

Without derogating from the merit of his forbearance, he might be supposed to have cast an eye upon the change and uncertainty of human affairs which he had seen himself, and which had convinced him we were all in one another's power by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion;—and that to restrain the cruelties and stop the insolence of men's resentments, God has so ordered it in the course of his providence, that very often in this world,—our revenges return upon our own heads, and men's violent dealings upon their own pates.

And, besides these considerations,—that, in generously forgiving an enemy, he was the truest friend to his own character, and should gain more to it by such an instance of subduing his spirit, than if he had taken a city.—The brave only know how to forgive!—it is the most refined and generous pitch of virtue human nature can arrive at.*—Cowards have done good and kind actions; cowards have even fought,—nay, sometimes even conquered;—but a coward never forgave! it is not in his nature;—the power of doing it flows only from a strength and greatness of soul, conscious of its own force and security, and above the little temptations of resenting every fruitless attempt to interrupt its happiness. Moreover, setting aside all considerations of his character in passing by an injury, he was the truest friend likewise to his own happiness and peace of mind; he never felt that fretful storm of passions which hurry men on to acts of

* Christian Hero.

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revenge,—or suffered those pangs of horror which pursue it. Thus he might possibly argue, and no farther;—for want of a better foundation and better helps, he could raise the building no higher;—to carry it upwards to its perfection, we must call in to our aid that more spiritual and refined doctrine introduced upon it by Christ; namely,—To forgive a brother not only to seven times, but to seventy times seven; that is, without limitation.

In this the excellency of the Gospel is said, by some one, to appear with a remarkable advantage; 'That a Christian is as much disposed to love and 'serve you when your enemy, as the mere moral 'man can be when he is your friend.'—This, no doubt, is the tendency of his religion;—but how often, or in what degrees it succeeds,—how nearly the practice keeps pace with the theory, the all-wise Searcher into the hearts of men is alone able to determine. But it is to be feared that such great effects are not so sensibly felt as a speculative man would expect from such powerful motives; and there is many a Christian society which would be glad to compound amongst themselves for some lesser degrees of perfection on one hand, were they sure to be exempted, on the other, from the bad effects of those fretful passions which are ever taking, as well as ever giving, the occasions of strife; the beginnings of which Solomon aptly compares to the letting out of waters,—the opening a breach which no one can be sure to stop till it has proceeded to the most fatal events.

With justice, therefore, might the son of Sirach conclude, concerning pride,—that secret stream which administers to the overflowings of resentments,—that it was not made for man; nor furious anger, for

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him that is born of a woman. That the one did not become his station —and that the other was destructive to all the happiness he was intended to receive from it. How miserably then must those men turn tyrants against themselves, as well as others, who grow splenetic and revengeful, not only upon the little unavoidable oppositions and offences they must meet with in the commerce of the world, but upon those which only reach them by report, and accordingly torment their little souls with meditating how to return the injury before they are certain they have received one! — Whether this eager sensibility of wrongs and resentment arises from that general cause to which the son of Sirach seems to reduce all fierce anger or passion; or whether to a certain sourness of temper, which stands in every body's way, and therefore subject to be often hurt;—from whichever cause the disorder springs, the advice of the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus is proper:— 'Admonish a friend,' says he: 'it may be he hath 'not done it; and if he have, that he do it not again. 'Admonish thy friend: it may be that he hath not 'said it; and if he have, that he speak it not again. 'There is that slippeth in his speech, but not from 'his heart: and who is he who hath not offended 'with his tongue?'

I cannot help taking notice here of a certain species of forgiveness, which is seldom enforced or thought of, and yet in no way below our regard: I mean the forgiveness of those, if we may be allowed the expression, whom we have injured ourselves. One would think that the difficulty of forgiving could only rest on the side of him who has received the wrong; but the truth of the fact is often otherwise. The consciousness of having provoked another's re-

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sentment often excites the aggressor to keep beforehand with the man he has hurt, and not only to hate him for the evil he expects in return, but even to pursue him down, and put it out of his power to make reprisals.

The baseness of this is such that it is sufficient to make the same observation which was made upon the crime of parricide among the Grecians:—it was so black,—their legislators did not suppose it could be committed, and, therefore, made no law to punish it.

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SERMON XIII.

DUTY OF SETTING BOUNDS TO OUR DESIRES.

2 KINGS, iv. 13.

And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care;—what is to be done for thee?—wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?—And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

THE first part of the text is the words which the prophet Elisha puts into the mouth of his servant Gehazi, as a message of thanks to the woman of Shunem, for her great kindness and hospitality; of which, after the acknowledgment of his just sense, which Gehazi is bid to deliver in the words,—'Behold 'thou hast been careful for us with all this care,'—he directs him to enquire in what way he may best make a return in discharge of the obligation,—'What shall be done for thee? Wouldest thou be 'spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?' —The last part of the text is the Shunamite's answer, which implies a refusal of the honour or advantage which the prophet intended to bring upon her by such an application, which she indirectly expresses in her contentment and satisfaction with what she enjoyed in her present station,—'I dwell among 'mine own people.' This instance of self-denial in the Shunamite is but properly the introduction to her story, and gives rise to that long and very pathetic transaction which follows,—in the super-

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natural grant of a child, which God had many years denied her; the affecting loss of him as soon as he was grown up,—and his restoration to life by Elisha, after he had been some time dead; the whole of which, though extremely interesting, and forming such incidents as would afford sufficient matter for instruction, yet, as it will not fall within the intention of this discourse, I shall beg leave at this time barely to consider those previous circumstances of it, to which the text confines me: upon which I shall enlarge with such reflections as occur, and then proceed to that practical use and exhortation which will naturally fall from it.

We find that, after Elisha had rescued the distressed widow and her two sons from the hands of the creditor, by the miraculous multiplication of her oil,—that he passed on to Shunem, where, we read, was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread; and so it was, that, as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. The sacred historian speaks barely of her temporal condition and station in life,—that she 'was a great woman,' but describes not the more material part of her (her virtues and character), because they were more evidently to be discovered from the transaction itself; from which it appears, that she was not only wealthy, but likewise charitable, and of a very considerate turn of mind;—for after many repeated invitations and entertainments at her house, finding his occasions called him to a frequent passage that way, she moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for him, with all the conveniences which the simplicity of those times required: 'And she said 'unto her husband, Behold, now I perceive that this 'is an holy man of God, which passeth by us con-'tinually: let us make him a little chamber, I pray

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'thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, 'and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it 'shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in 'thither.'—She perceived he was a holy man;—she had many opportunities, as he passed by them continually, of observing his behaviour and deportment, which she had carefully remarked, and saw plainly what he was;—that the sanctity and simplicity of his manners,—the severity of his life,—his zeal for the religion of his God,—and the uncommon fervency of devotion, when he worshipped before him, which seemed his whole business and employment upon earth,—all bespoke him not a man of this world, but one whose heart and affections were fixed upon another object, which was dearer and more important to him. But as such outward appearances may, and often have been counterfeited, so that the actions of a man are certainly the only interpreters to be relied on, whether such colours are true or false,—so she had heard that all was of a-piece there, and that he was throughout consistent; that he had never in any one instance of his life acted as if he had any views in the affairs of this world, in which he had never interested himself at all, but where the glory of his God, or the good and preservation of his fellow-creatures, at first inclined him: that, in a late instance, before he came to Shunem, he had done one of the kindest and most charitable actions that a good man could have done, in assisting the widow and fatherless; and, as the fact was singular, and had just happened before her knowledge of him, no doubt she had heard the story with all the tender circumstances which a true report would give in its favour; namely, that a certain woman, whose husband was lately dead, and had left her with her children in a very helpless condition,—very desti-

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tute,—and, what was still worse, charged with a debt she was not able to pay;—that her creditor bore exceeding hard upon her, and, finding her little worth in substance, was going to take the advantage which the law allowed of seizing her two sons for his bondsmen; so that she had not only lost her husband, which had made her miserable enough already, but was going to be bereaved of her children, who were the only comfort and support of her life:—that upon her coming to Elisha with this sad story, he was touched with compassion for her misfortunes, and had used all the power and interest which he had with his God to relieve and befriend her, which, in an unheard-of manner, by the miraculous increase of her oil, which was the only substance she had left, he had so bountifully effected, as not only to disentangle her from her difficulties in paying the debt, but withal, what was still more generous, to enable her to live comfortably the remainder of her days. She considered that charity and compassion was so leading a virtue, and had such an influence upon every other part of a man's character, as to be a sufficient proof by itself of the inward disposition and goodness of the heart; but that so engaging an instance of it as this, exercised in so kind and so seasonable a manner, was a demonstration of his,—and that he was in truth what outward circumstances bespoke, a holy man of God.——As the Shunamite's principle and motive for her hospitality to Elisha was just, as it sprung from an idea of the worth and merit of her guest, so likewise was the manner of doing it kind and considerate. It is observable, she does not solicit her husband to assign him an apartment in her own house,—but to build him a chamber on the wall, apart;—she considered,—that true piety wanted no witnesses, and was always most at ease

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when most private;—that the tumult and distraction of a large family were not fit for the silent meditations of so holy a man, who would perpetually there meet with something either to interrupt his devotion, or offend the purity of his manners; — that, moreover, under such an independent roof, where he could take shelter as often as his occasions required, she thought he might taste the pleasure which was natural to man, in possessing something like what he could call his own,—and, what is no small part of conferring a favour, he would scarce feel the weight of it, or at least much seldomer in this manner than where a daily invitation and repetition of the kindness perpetually put him in mind of his obligation. If any thing could still add to this,—it was, that it did not appear to be the dry offer of a faint civility, but that it came directly from the heart. There is a nicety in honest minds, which will not accept of a cold and suspected offer;—and even when it appears to be sincere and truly meant, there is a modesty in true merit which knows not how to accept it: and no doubt she had one, if not both these difficulties to conquer in their turns;—for we read that she constrained him, and in all likelihood forced his acceptance of it, with all the warmth and friendly openness of a humane and hospitable temper.

It is with benefits as with injuries in this respect, that we do not so much weigh the accidental good or evil they do us, as that which they were designed to do us;—that is, we consider no part of them so much as their intention: and the prophet's behaviour consequent upon this, shews he beheld it through this medium, or in some such advantageous light as I have placed it.

There is no burden so heavy to a grateful mind, as

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a debt of kindness unpaid;—and we may believe Elisha felt it so, from the earnest desire which he had upon the immediate receipt of this, to discharge himself of it; which he expresses in the text in the warmest manner:—'Behold, thou hast been careful for us with 'all this care,—what shall be done for thee? Wouldest 'thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the 'host?' There is a degree of honest impatience in the words, such as was natural to a good man, who would not be behind-hand with his benefactor.—But there is one thing which may seem strange at first sight, that as her station and condition of life was such, that she appeared rather to have abounded already, than stood in want of any thing in this world which such an application could supply,—why the prophet should not rather have proposed some spiritual advantage, which, as it would better have become the sanctity of his character on the one hand, so, on the other, it would have done a more real and lasting service to his friend.

But we are to reflect, that, in returning favours we act differently from what we do in conferring them;—in the one case we simply consider what is best;—in the other, what is most acceptable. The reason is, that we have a right to act according to our own ideas of what will do the party most good, in the case where we bestow a favour;—but where we return one, we lose this right, and act according to his conceptions who has obliged us, and endeavour to repay in such a manner as we think is most likely to be accepted in discharge of the obligation.—So that, though we are not to imagine Elisha could be wanting in religious duties, as well as wishes, to so hospitable a friend, we may yet suppose he was directed here by this principle of equity:—and that in reflecting in what

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manner he should requite his benefactress, he had considered, that to one of her affluent condition, who had all the reasonable comforts of an independent life, —if there was any passion yet unsatisfied, it must certainly be ambition: that though in general it was an irregular appetite, which, in most cases, 'twas dangerous to gratify, yet in effect 'twas only so far criminal as the power which is acquired was perverted to bad and vicious purposes, which it was not likely to be here, from the specimen she had already given of her disposition, which showed that if she did wish for an increase of wealth or honour, she wished it only as it would enable her more generously to extend her arm in kind offices, and increase the power as well as the opportunities of doing good.

In justice to Elisha's motive, which must have been good, we must suppose he considered his offer in this light; and what principally led him to propose it, was the great interest he had with the king of Israel at that time, which he had merited by a single service; and as he had no views for himself, he thought it could not be employed so well as in establishing the fortune of one, whose virtue might be so safely trusted with it. It was a justifiable prepossession in her favour,—though one not always to be relied on; for there is many a one who in a moderate station, and with a lesser degree of power, has behaved with honour and unblemished reputation; and who has even borne the buffetings of adverse fortune well, and manifested great presence and strength of mind under it, whom nevertheless a high exaltation has at once overcome, and so entirely changed, as if the party had left not only his virtue, but even himself behind him.

Whether the Shunamite dreaded to make this dan-

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gerous experiment of herself; — or, which is more likely, that she had learned to set bounds to her desires, and was too well satisfied with her present condition to be tempted out of it; she declines the offer in the close of the text:—'I dwell amongst 'mine own people:' as if she had said, 'The intended 'kindness is far from being small, but it is not useful 'to me: I live here, as thou art a witness, in peace, 'in a contented obscurity;—not so high as to provoke 'envy, nor so low as to be trodden down and despised. 'In this safe and middle state, as I have lived amongst 'my own people, so let me die out of the reach both 'of the cares and glories of the world.—'Tis fit, O 'holy man of God, that I learn some time or other to set bounds to my desires; and if I cannot fix them now, when I have already more than my wants 'require, when shall I hope to do it?—Or how should 'I expect, that even this increase of honour or fortune 'would fully satisfy and content my ambition, should 'I now give way to it?'

So engaging an instance of unaffected moderation and self-denial, deserves well to be considered by the bustlers in this world;—because, if we are to trust the face and course of things, we scarce see any virtue so hard to be put in practice, and which the generality of mankind seem so unwilling to learn, as this of knowing when they have enough, and when it is time to give over their worldly pursuits.—Aye! but nothing is more easy, you will answer, than to fix this point, and set certain bounds to it.—'For my own part (you 'will say), I declare I want, and would wish no more 'but a sufficient competency of those things which are 'requisite to the real uses and occasions of life, suitable 'to the way I have been taught to expect from use and 'education.'—But recollect how seldom it ever hap-

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pens, when these points are secured, but that new occasions and new necessities present themselves; and every day as you grow richer, fresh wants are discovered, which rise up before you as you ascend the hill; so that every step you take,—every accession to your fortune sets your desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction;—that something you have not yet grasped, and possibly never shall;—that devil of a phantom, unpossessed and unpossessable, is perpetually haunting you, and stepping in betwixt you and your contentment.—Unhappy creature!—to think of enjoying that blessing without moderation,—or imagine that so sacred a temple can be raised upon the foundation of wealth or power!—If the groundwork is not laid within your own mind, they will as soon add a cubit to your stature as to your happiness. To be convinced it is so, pray look up to those who have got as high as their warmest wishes could carry them in this ascent:—do you observe they live the better, the longer, the merrier;—or that they sleep the sounder in their beds, for having twice as much as they wanted, or well know how to dispose of?—Of all rules for calculating happiness, this is the most deceitful, and which few but weak minds, and those unpractised in the world too, ever think of applying as the measure in such an estimation.—Great and inexpressible may be the happiness which a moderate fortune and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure. Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises cheerful to his labour:—Why should they not?—Look into his house, the seat of each man's happiness;—has he not the same domestic endearments,—the same joy and comfort in his children, and as flattering hopes of their doing well, to enliven his hours and gladden his heart, as you

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could conceive in the highest station?—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true state of his joys and sufferings could be fairly balanced with those of his betters, whether any thing would appear at the foot of the account but what would recommend the moral of this discourse.—This, I own, is not to be attained to by the cynical stale trick of haranguing against the goods of fortune;—they were never intended to be talked out of the world.—But as virtue and true wisdom lie in the middle of extremes,—on one hand, not to neglect and despise riches so as to forget ourselves; and, on the other, not to pursue and love them so as to forget God;—to have them sometimes in our heads,—but always, something more important in our hearts.

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SERMON XIV.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

ISAIAH, i. 3.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—but Israel doth not know;—my people doth not consider.

'Tis a severe but an affectionate reproach of the prophet's, laid against the Israelites, which may safely be applied to every heedless and unthankful people, who are neither won by God's mercies, nor terrified by his punishments.—There is a giddy, thoughtless, intemperate spirit gone forth into the world, which possesses the generality of mankind;—and the reason the world is undone is, because the world does not consider,—considers neither awful regard to God,—nor the true relation themselves bear to him. Could they consider this, and learn to weigh the causes, and compare the consequences of things, and to exercise the reason which God has put into us for the government and direction of our lives,—there would be some hopes of a reformation.—But, as the world goes, there is no leisure for such enquiries; and so full are our minds of other matters, that we have not time to ask, nor a heart to answer, the questions we ought to put to ourselves.

Whatever our condition is, 'tis good to be acquainted with it in time, to be able to supply what is wanting, and examine the state of our accounts before we come to give them up to an impartial Judge.

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The most inconsiderate see the reasonableness of this;—there being few, I believe, either so thoughtless, —or even so bad,—but that they sometimes enter upon this duty, and have some short intervals of self-examination, which they are forced upon, if from no other motive, yet at least to free themselves from the load and oppression of spirits they must necessarily be subject to without it.—But as the Scripture frequently intimates,—and observation confirms it daily,—that there are many mistakes attending the discharge of this duty,—I cannot make the remainder of this discourse more useful than by a short enquiry into them. I shall therefore, first, beg leave to remind you of some of the many unhappy ways by which we often set about this irksome task of examining our works, without being either the better or the wiser for the employment.

And, first, then, let us begin with that which is the foundation of all the other false measures we take in this matter;—that is, the setting about the examination of our works, before we are prepared with honest dispositions to amend them:—this is beginning the work at the wrong end. These previous dispositions in the heart are the wheels that should make this work go easily and successfully forwards;—and to take them off, and proceed without them, 'tis no miracle, if, like Pharaoh's chariots, they that drive them—drive them heavily along.

Besides, if a man is not sincerely inclined to reform his faults,—'tis not likely he should be inclined to see them;—nor will all the Weekly Preparations that ever were wrote, bring him nearer the point:—so that with how serious a face soever he begins to examine,—he no longer does the office of an inquirer,—but an apologist; whose business is not to search for truth,—

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but skilfully to hide it.—So long, therefore, as this pre-engagement lasts between the man and his old habits,—there is little prospect of proving his works to any good purpose,—of whatever kind they are, with so strong an interest and power on their side.—As in other trials, so in this, 'tis no wonder if the evidence is puzzled and confounded, and the several facts and circumstances so twisted from their natural shapes, and the whole proof so altered and confirmed on the other side,—as to leave the last state of that man even worse than the first.

A second unhappy, though general, mistake in this great duty of proving our works, is that which the apostle hints at; in the doing it, not by a direct examination of our own actions, but from a comparative view of them with the lives and actions of other men.

When a man is going to enter upon this work of self-examination,—there is nothing so common as to see him look *round* him,—instead of looking *within* him. He looks round,—finds out some one who is more malicious,—sees another that is more covetous,—a third that is more proud and imperious than himself;—and so indirectly forms a judgment of himself, not from a review of his life, and a proving of his own works, as the apostle directs him, but rather from proving the works of others, and from their infirmities and defects, drawing a deceitful conclusion in favour of himself.—In all competitions of this kind,—one may venture to say, there will be ever so much of self-love in a man, as to draw a flattering likeness of one of the parties;—and 'tis well,—if he has not so much malignity too, as to give but a coarse picture of the other,—finished with so many hard strokes, as to make the one as unlike its original as the other.

Thus the pharisee, when he entered the temple,—no

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sooner saw the publican, but that moment he formed the idea to himself of all the vices and corruptions that could possibly enter into the man's character,—and with great dexterity, stated all his own virtues and good qualities over against them. His abstinence and frequent fasting, — exactness in the debts and ceremonies of the law; not balancing the account as he ought to have done, in this manner:—'What! though 'this man is a publican and a sinner, have not I my 'vices as well as he?—'Tis true, his particular office 'exposes him to many temptations of committing ex- 'tortion and injustice;—but then, am I not a devourer 'of widows' houses, and guilty of one of the most 'cruel instances of the same crime? He possibly is a 'profane person, and may set religion at nought:—but 'do not I myself, for a pretence, make long prayers, 'and bring the greatest of all scandals upon religion, 'by making it a cloke to my ambitious and worldly 'views?—If he, lastly, is debauched and intemperate, '—am not I conscious of as corrupt and wanton dis- 'positions; and that a fair and guarded outside is my 'best pretence to the opposite character?'

If a man will examine his works by a comparative view of them with others,—this, no doubt, would be the fairer, and least likely to mislead him.—But this is seldom the method this trial has gone through;—in fact, it generally turns out to be as treacherous and delusive to the man himself, as it is uncandid to the man who is dragged into the comparison; and whoever judges of himself by this rule,—so long as there is no scarcity of vicious characters in the world,—'tis to be feared he will often take the occasions of triumph and rejoicing,—where, in truth, he ought rather to be sorry and ashamed.

A third error in the manner of proving our works, is

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what we are guilty of when we leave out of the calculation the only material parts of them;—I mean, the motives and first principles from whence they proceeded. There is many a fair instance of generosity, chastity, and self-denial, which the world may give a man the credit of;—which, if he would give himself the leisure to reflect upon, and trace back to their first springs,—he would be conscious, proceeded from such views and intentions, as, if known, would not be to his honour.—The truth of this may be made evident by a thousand instances in life:—and yet there is nothing more usual than for a man when he is going upon this duty of self-examination,—instead of calling his own ways to remembrance,—to close the whole enquiry at once with this short challenge,—'That he 'defies the world to say ill of him.' If the world has no express evidence, this indeed may be an argument of his good luck; but no satisfactory one of the real goodness and innocence of his life.—A man may be a very bad man,—and yet, through caution,—through deep-laid policy and design, may so guard all outward appearances, as never to want this negative testimony on his side,—'That the world knows no evil of him,' —how little soever he deserves it.—Of all assays upon a man's self, this may be said to be the slightest; this method of proving the goodness of our works,—differing but little in kind from that unhappy one,—which many unwary people take in proving the goodness of their coin;—who, if it happens to be suspicious,—instead of bringing it either to the balance or the touchstone to try its worth,—they ignorantly go forth, and try if they can pass it upon the world:—if so, all is well, and they are saved all the expense and pains of enquiring after and detecting the cheat.

A fourth error in this duty of examination of men's

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work is, that of committing the task to others;—an error into which thousands of well-meaning creatures are ensnared in the Romish church by her doctrines of auricular confession, of works of supererogation, and the many lucrative practices raised upon that capital stock:—the trade of which is carried to such a height in Popish countries, that if you was at Rome or Naples now, and was disposed, in compliance with the apostle's exhortation in the text, to set about this duty, to prove your *own* works,—'tis great odds whether you would be suffered to do it yourself, without interruption: and you might be said to have escaped well, if the first person you consulted upon it did not talk you out of your resolution, and possibly your senses too at the same time.—Prove your works! —For Heaven's sake desist from so rash an undertaking!—What!—trust your own skill and judgment in a matter of so much difficulty and importance,—when there are so many whose business it is,—who understand it so well,—and who can do it for you with so much safety and advantage!

If your works must be proved, you would be advised by all means to send them to undergo this operation with some one who knows what he is about; either some expert and noted confessor of the church, —or to some convent,—or religious society, who are in possession of a large stock of good works of all kinds, wrought up by saints and confessors, where you may suit yourself,—and either get the defects of your own supplied,—or be accommodated with new ones ready proved to your hands, sealed, and certified to be so by the Pope's commissary and the notaries of his ecclesiastic court. There needs little more to lay open this fatal error,—than barely to represent it: so I shall only add a short remark,—

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That they who are persuaded to be thus virtuous by proxy, and will prove the goodness of their works only by deputies,—will have no reason to complain against God's justice,—if He suffers them to go to heaven only in the same manner;—that is,—by deputies too.

The last mistake which I shall have time to mention is, that which the Methodists have revived; for 'tis no new error,—but one which has misled thousands before these days, wherever enthusiasm had got footing;—and that is,—the attempting to prove their works by that very argument which is the greatest proof of their weakness and superstition; I mean that extraordinary impulse and intercourse with the Spirit of God which they pretend to, and whose operations (if you trust them) are so sensibly felt in their hearts and souls, as to render at once all other proofs of their works needless to themselves.—This, I own, is one of the most summary ways of proceeding in this duty of self-examination;—and, as it proves a man's works in the gross, it saves him a world of sober thought and enquiry after many vexatious particulars.

Indeed, if the premises were true,—the inference is direct;—for when a man dreams of these inward workings,—and wakes with the impression of them strong upon his brain, 'tis not strange he should think himself a chosen vessel,—sanctified within, and sealed up unto the perfect day of redemption; and so long as such a one is led captive by this error,—there is nothing in nature to induce him to this duty of examining his own works in the sense of the prophet:—for however bad they are,—so long as his credulity and enthusiasm equal them, 'tis impossible they should disturb his conscience, or frighten him into a reformation. These are some of the unhappy

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mistakes in the many methods this work is set about, —which, in a great measure, rob us of the fruits we expected,—and sometimes so entirely blast them, that we are neither the better nor wiser for all the pains we have taken.

There are many other false steps which lead us the same way;—but the delineations of these, however, may serve at present, not only as so many land-marks to guard us from this dangerous coast which I have described, but to direct us likewise into that safe one, where we can only expect the reward the Gospel promises:—for if, according to the first recited causes, a man fails in examining his works, from a disinclination to reform them,—from partiality of comparisons, from flattery to his own motives, and a vain dependence upon the opinion of the world,—the conclusion is unavoidable, that he must search for the qualities the most opposite to these for his conductors;—and if he hopes to discharge this work so as to have advantage from it, that he must set out upon the principles of an honest head, willing to reform itself, and attached principally to that object, without regard to the spiritual condition of others, or the misguided opinions which the world may have of himself.

That for this end,—he must call his own ways to remembrance, and search out his spirit,—search his actions with the same critical exactness and same piercing curiosity we are wont to sit in judgment upon others;—varnishing nothing,—and disguising nothing. If he proceeds thus, and in every relation of life takes a full view of himself without prejudice; —traces his actions to their principles without mercy, and looks into the dark corners and recesses of his heart without fear, and, if upon such an enquiry he

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acts consistent with his view in it, by reforming his errors, separating the dross, and purifying the whole mass with repentance,—this will bid fair for examining a man's works in the apostle's sense: and whoever discharges the duty thus, with a view to Scripture, which is the rule in this case,—and to reason, which is the applier of this rule in all cases,—need not fear but he will have what the prophet calls 'rejoicing in 'himself,'—and that he will lay the foundation of his peace and comfort where it ought to lie;—that is, within himself,—in the testimony of a good conscience, and the joyful expectation that, having done his most to examine his *own* works here, God will accept them hereafter, through the merits of Christ;—which God grant! Amen.

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SERMON XV.

JOB'S EXPOSTULATION WITH HIS WIFE.

JOB, ii. 10.

What! Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?

THESE are the words of Job, uttered in the depth of his misfortunes, by way of reproof to his wife, for the counsel we find she had given him in the foregoing verse; namely, Not to retain his integrity any longer, —but to 'curse God and die.' Though it is not very evident what was particularly meant and implied in the words,—'Curse God and die,'—yet it is certain, from Job's reply to them, that they directed him to some step which was rash and unwarrantable; and, probably, as it is generally explained, meant that he should openly call God's justice to an account, and, by a blasphemous accusation of it, provoke God to destroy his being: as if she had said,—'After so many 'sad things which have befallen thee,—notwithstanding 'thy integrity,—what gainest thou by serving God, 'seeing he bears thus hard upon thee, as though thou 'wast his enemy?—Ought so faithful a servant as thou 'hast been, to receive so much unkind treatment at 'his hands,—and tamely to submit to it?—patiently 'to sustain the evils he has brought upon thy house,

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'and neither murmur with thy lips, nor charge him 'with injustice?—Bear it not thus;—and as thy piety 'could not at first protect thee from such misfortunes, '—nor thy behaviour under them could since move 'God to take pity on thee,—change thy conduct 'towards him,—boldly expostulate with him,—up-'braid him openly with unkindness,—call his justice 'and providence to an account for oppressing thee in 'so undeserved a manner, and get that benefit by pro-'voking him, which thou hast not been able to obtain 'by serving him, to die at once by his hands, and be 'freed at least from the greater misery of a lingering 'and more tormenting death.'

On the other hand, some interpreters tell us,—that the word *curse*, in the original, is equivocal, and does more literally signify here, to bless, than to blaspheme; and consequently, that the whole is rather to be considered as a sarcastical scoff at Job's piety;—as if it had been said,—'Go to, bless God, and die;—since 'thou art so ready to praise him in troubles as thou 'hast done, go on in thy own way, and see how God 'will reward thee by a miserable death, which thou 'canst not avoid.'

Without disputing the merit of these two interpretations, it may not seem an improbable conjecture, that the words imply something still different from what is expressed in either of them;—and, instead of supposing them as an incitement to blaspheme God,—which was madness,—or that they were intended as an insult, which was unnatural,—that her advice to curse God and die, was meant here, that he should resolve upon a voluntary death himself, which was an act not only in his own power, but what carried some appearance of a remedy with it, and promised, at least at first sight, some respite from pain, as it

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would put an end both to his life and his misfortunes together.

One may suppose that, with all the concern and affection which was natural, she beheld her lord afflicted both with poverty and sickness;—by one sudden blow, brought down from his palace to the dunghill;—in one mournful day she saw that not only the fortunes of his house were blasted, but likewise the hopes of his posterity cut off for ever by the untimely loss of his children. She knew he was a virtuous and an upright man, and deserved a better fate:—her heart bled the more for him;—she saw the prospect before him was dreadful;—that there appeared no possible means which could retrieve the sad situation of his affairs;—that death,—the last, the surest friend of the unfortunate,—could only set him free;—and that it was better to resolve upon that at once, than vainly endeavour to wade through such a sea of troubles, which, in the end, would overwhelm him. We may suppose her spirits sinking under those apprehensions, when she began to look upon his constancy as a fruitless virtue, and, from that persuasion, to have said unto him,—Curse God,—depend no longer upon him, nor wait the issues of his providence, which has already forsaken thee:—as there is no help from that quarter, resolve to extricate thyself;—and, since thou hast met with no justice in this world,—leave it,—die, and force thy passage into a better country, where misfortunes cannot follow thee.

Whether this paraphrase upon the words is just, or the former interpretations be admitted, the reply in the text is equally proper;—What!—Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil also? Are not both alike the dispensations of an all-wise and good Being, who knows and determines

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what *is best?* And wherefore should I make myself the judge, to receive the one, and yet be so partial as to reject the other, when, by fairly putting both into the scale, I may be convinced how much the good outweighs the evil in all cases? In my own, consider how strong this argument is against me.

In the beginning of my days, how did God crown me with honour! In how remarkable a manner did his providence set a hedge about me, and about all that I had on every side!—how he prospered the works of my hands, so that our substance and happiness increased every day!

And now, when, for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, he has thought fit to try me with afflictions,—shall I rebel against him, in sinning with my lips, and charging him foolishly?—God forbid!—O, rather, may I look up towards that hand which has bruised me;—for he maketh sore, and he bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. From his bounty only has issued all I had; from his wisdom —all I have lost; for he giveth, and he hath taken away: blessed be his name!

There are few instances of particular virtue more engaging than those of this heroic cast; and, if we take the testimony of a heathen philosopher upon it, there is not an object in this world which God can be supposed to look down upon with greater pleasure than that of a good man involved in misfortunes, surrounded on all sides with difficulties,—yet cheerfully bearing up his head, and struggling against them with firmness and constancy of mind.—Certainly, to our conceptions, such objects must be truly engaging: and the reason of so exalted an encomium from this hand is easily to be guessed; no doubt, the wisest of the heathen philosophers had found,

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from observation upon the life of man, that the many troubles and infirmities of his nature, the sicknesses, disappointments, sorrows for the loss of children or property, with the numberless other calamities and cross accidents to which the life of man is subject, were in themselves so *great;*—and so *little* solid comfort to be administered from the mere refinements of philosophy in such emergencies, that there was no virtue which required greater efforts, or which was found so difficult to be achieved upon moral principles,—upon moral principles, which had no foundation to sustain this great weight which the infirmities of our nature laid upon it:—and, for this reason, 'tis observable, that there is no subject upon which the moral writers of antiquity have exhausted so much of their eloquence, or where they have spent such time and pains, as in this of endeavouring to reconcile men to these evils; insomuch, that from thence, in most modern languages, the patient enduring of affliction has, by degrees, obtained the name of philosophy, and almost monopolised the word to itself, as if it was the chief end or compendium of all the wisdom which philosophy had to offer. And indeed, considering what lights they had, some of them wrote exceedingly well: yet, as what they said proceeded more from the head than the heart, 'twas generally more calculated to silence a man in his troubles, than to convince and teach him how to bear them; and therefore, however subtle and ingenious their arguments might appear in the reading, 'tis to be feared they lost much of their efficacy when tried in the application. If a man was thrust back in the world by disappointments, or, as was Job's case, had suffered a sudden change in his fortunes, from an affluent condition was brought down by a train of cruel accidents, and pinched with

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poverty,—philosophy would come in, and exhort him to stand his ground;—it would tell him, that the same greatness and strength of mind which enabled him to behave well in the days of his prosperity, should equally enable him to behave well in the days of his adversity;—that it was the property of only weak and base spirits, who were insolent in the one, to be dejected and overthrown by the other; whereas, great and generous souls were at all times calm and equal: as they enjoyed the advantages of life with indifference, they were able to resign them with the same temper,—and, consequently, were out of the reach of fortune. All which, however fine, and likely to satisfy the fancy of a man of ease, could convey but little consolation to a heart already pierced with sorrow;—nor is it to be conceived how an unfortunate creature should any more receive relief from such a lecture, however just, than a man racked with an acute fit of the gout or stone could be supposed to be set free from torture by hearing from his physician a nice dissertation upon his case. The philosophic consolations in sickness, or in afflictions for the death of friends and kindred, were just as efficacious;—and were rather, in general, to be considered as good sayings, than good remedies:—so that, if a man bereaved of a promised child, in whom all his hopes and expectations centered,—or a wife was left destitute to mourn the loss and protection of a kind and tender husband,—Seneca or Epictetus would tell the pensive parent and disconsolate widow,—that tears and lamentations for the dead were fruitless and absurd!—that to die, was the necessary and unavoidable debt of nature:—and, as it could admit of no remedy,—'twas impious and foolish to grieve and fret themselves upon it. Upon such sage counsel,

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as well as many other lessons of the same stamp, the same reflection might be applied, which is said to have been made by one of the Roman emperors to one who administered the same consolations to him on a like occasion;—to whom, advising him to be comforted, and make himself easy, since the event had been brought about by fatality, and could not be helped,—he replied,—'That this was so far from 'lessening his trouble,—that it was the very cir-'cumstance which occasioned it.'—So that, upon the whole,—when the true value of these, and many more of their current arguments, have been weighed and brought to the test,—one is led to doubt whether the greatest part of their heroes, the most renowned for constancy, were not much more indebted to good nerves and spirits, or the natural happy frame of their tempers for behaving well, than to any extraordinary helps which they could be supposed to receive from their instructors: and, therefore, I should make no scruple to assert, that one such instance of patience and resignation as this, which the Scripture gives us in the person of Job, not of one most pompously declaiming upon the contempt of pain and poverty, but of a man sunk in the lowest condition of humanity, to behold him when stripped of his estate,—his wealth, his friends, his children,—cheerfully holding up his head, and entertaining his hard fortune with firmness and serenity,—and this, not from a stoical stupidity, but a just sense of God's providence, and a persuasion of his justice and goodness in all his dealings; such an example, I say, as this, is of more universal use, speaks truer to the heart, than all the heroic precepts which the pedantry of philosophy has to offer.

This leads me to the point I aim at in this Dis-

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course; namely, that there are no principles but those of religion to be depended on in cases of real distress; and that these are able to encounter the worst emergencies, and to bear us up under all the changes and chances to which our life is subject.

Consider then what virtue the very first principle of religion has, and how wonderfully it is conducive to this end. That there is a God, a powerful, a wise, a good Being, who first made the world, and continues to govern it; by whose goodness all things are designed; —and by whose providence all things are conducted, to bring about the greatest and best ends. The sorrowful and pensive wretch that was giving way to his misfortunes, and mournfully sinking under them, the moment this doctrine comes in to his aid, hushes all his complaints,—and thus speaks comfort to his soul:—'It is the Lord,—let him do what seemeth him 'good;'—without his direction, I know that no evil can befall me,—without his permission, that no power can hurt me.—It is impossible a Being so wise should mistake my happiness,—or that a Being so good should contradict it. If he has denied me riches and other advantages,—perhaps he foresees the gratifying my wishes would undo me, and, by my own abuse of them, be perverted to my ruin.—If he has denied me the request of children,—or, in his providence, has thought fit to take them from me,—how can I say—whether he has not dealt kindly with me, and only taken that away which he foresaw would embitter and shorten my days? It does so to thousands, where the disobedience of a thankless child has brought down the parent's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Has he visited me with sickness, poverty, or other disappointments?—can I say but these are blessings in disguise?—so many different expressions of his care

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and concern to disentangle my thoughts from this world, and fix them upon another,—another, a better world beyond this!—This thought opens a new scene of hope and consolation to the unfortunate;—and, as the persuasion of a Providence reconciles him to the evils he has suffered,—this prospect of a future life gives him strength to despise them, and esteem the light afflictions of his life as they are,—not worthy to be compared to what is reserved for him hereafter.

Things are great or small by comparison;—and he who looks no farther than this world, and balances the accounts of his joys and sufferings from that consideration, finds all his sorrows enlarged, and, at the close of them, will be apt to look back, and cast the same sad reflection upon the whole which the Patriarch did to Pharaoh,—'That few and evil had 'been the days of his pilgrimage.' But let him lift up his eyes towards Heaven, and stedfastly behold the life and immortality of a future state;—he then wipes away all tears from off his eyes for ever and ever:—like the exiled captive, big with the hopes that he is returning home,—he feels not the weight of his chains, nor counts the days of his captivity, but looks forward with rapture towards the country where his heart is fled before him.

These are the aids which religion offers us towards the regulating of our spirit under the evils of life;—but, like great cordials, they are seldom used but on great occurrences.—In the lesser evils we seem to stand unguarded, and our peace and contentment are overthrown, and our happiness broke in upon by a little impatience of spirit, under the cross and untoward accidents we meet with.—These stand unprovided for, and we neglect them as we do the slighter

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indispositions of the body,—which we think not worth treating seriously,—and so leave them to nature. In good habits of the body, this may do;—and I would gladly believe there are such good habits of the temper; such a complexional ease and health of heart, as may often save the patient much medicine.—We are still to consider,—that however such good frames of mind are got,—they are worth preserving by all rules:—patience and contentment,—which, like the treasure hid in the field, for which man sold all he had to purchase,—is of that price, that it cannot be had at too great a purchase; since, without it, the best condition in life cannot make us happy;—and, with it, it is impossible we should be miserable even in the worst.—Give me leave, therefore, to close this Discourse with some reflections upon the subject of a contented mind,—and the duty in man of regulating his spirit, in our way through life;—a subject in every body's mouth,—preached upon daily to our friends and kindred,—but too oft in such a style, as to convince the party lectured only of this truth,—That we bear the misfortunes of others with excellent tranquillity.

I believe there are thousands so extravagant in their ideas of contentment, as to imagine that it must consist in having every thing in this world turn out the way they wish;—that they are to sit down in happiness, and feel themselves so at ease in all points, as to desire nothing better, and nothing more. I own there are instances of some who seem to pass through the world as if all their paths had been strewed with rose-buds of delight:—but a little experience will convince us, 'tis a fatal expectation to go upon.—We are born to trouble; and we may depend upon it, whilst we live in this world we shall have it, though

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with intermissions; — that is, in whatever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil; and, therefore, the true way to contentment is to know how to receive these certain vicissitudes of life, the returns of good and evil, so as neither to be exalted by the one, or overthrown by the other, but to bear ourselves towards every thing which happens with such ease and indifference of mind as to hazard as little as may be. This is the true temperate climate fitted for us by Nature, and in which every wise man would wish to live.—God knows, we are perpetually straying out of it; and, by giving wings to our imaginations in the transports we dream of, from such or such a situation in life, we are carried away alternately into all the extremes of hot and cold; for which as we are neither fitted by nature, nor prepared by expectation, we feel them with all their violence, and with all their danger too.

God, for wise reasons, has made our affairs in this world almost as fickle and capricious as ourselves;—pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other;—and he that knows how to accommodate himself to their periodical returns, and can wisely extract the good from the evil,—knows only how to live:—this is true contentment, at least all that is to be had of it in this world; and for this every man must be indebted, not to his fortune, but to himself.—And, indeed, it would have been strange, if a duty so becoming us as dependent creatures,—and so necessary, besides, to all our well-beings, had been placed out of the reach of any in some measure to put in practice;—and, for this reason, there is scarce any lot so low, but there is something in it to satisfy the man whom it has befallen; Providence having so ordered things, that in every man's

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cup, how bitter soever, there are some cordial drops, —some good circumstances, which, if wisely extracted, are sufficient for the purpose he wants them, —that is, to make him contented, and, if not happy, at least resigned. May God bless us all with this spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

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SERMON XVI.

THE CHARACTER OF SHIMEI.

2 SAMUEL, xix. 21. 1st Part.

But Abishai said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this?

——It has not a good aspect.—This is the second time Abishai has proposed Shimei's destruction; once in the 16th chapter, on a sudden transport of indignation, when Shimei cursed David.—'Why should this 'dead dog, cried Abishai, curse my lord the king? 'Let me go over, I pray thee, and cut off his head.' —This had something at least of gallantry in it; for, in doing it, he hazarded his own; and, besides, the offender was not otherwise to be come at. The second time is in the text, when the offender was absolutely in their power,—when the blood was cool, and the suppliant was holding up his hands for mercy.

—— Shall not Shimei, answered Abishai, be put to death for this? So unrelenting a pursuit looks less like justice than revenge, which is so cowardly a passion, that it renders Abishai's first instance almost inconsistent with the second. I shall not endeavour to reconcile them; but confine the Discourse simply to Shimei, and make such reflections upon his character as may be of use to society.

Upon the news of his son Absalom's conspiracy,

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David had fled from Jerusalem, and from his own house, for safety. The representation given of the manner of it was truly affecting: never was a scene of sorrow so full of distress!

The king fled with all his household, to save himself from the sword of the man he loved: he fled with all the marks of humble sorrow,—'with his head 'covered and barefoot:' and as he went by the ascent of mount Olivet, the sacred historian says he wept:—some gladsome scenes, perhaps, which there had pass'd,—some hours of festivity he had passed with Absalom in better days, pressed tenderly upon nature;—he wept at this sad vicissitude of things;—and all the people that were with him, smitten with his affliction, 'covered each man his head,—weeping as 'he went up.'

It was on this occasion, when David had got to Bahurim, that Shimei the son of Gera, as we read in the 5th verse, came out.—Was it with the choicest oils he could gather from mount Olivet, to pour into his wounds?—Times and troubles had done enough; and thou camest out, Shimei, to add thy portion!——

'And as he came, he cursed David, and threw 'stones and cast dust at him: and thus said Shimei, 'when he cursed: Go to, thou man of Belial, thou 'hast sought blood,—and behold thou art caught in 'thy own mischief; for now hath the Lord returned 'upon thee all the blood of Saul and his house.'

There is no small degree of malicious craft in fixing upon a season to give a mark of enmity and ill-will: a word,—a look,—which at one time would make no impression, at another time wounds the heart, and, like a shaft flying with the wind, pierces deep, which, with its own natural force, would scarce have reached the object aimed at.

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This seemed to have been Shimei's hopes: but excess of malice makes men too quick-sighted even for their own purpose. Could Shimei possibly have waited for the ebb of David's passions, and till the first great conflict within him had been over,—then the reproach of Saul's blood must have hurt him:—his heart was possessed with other feelings, it bled for the deadly sting which Absalom had given him;—he felt not the indignity of a stranger:—'Behold my son 'Absalom, who came out of my bowels, seeketh my 'life!—how much more may Shimei do it!—let him 'alone; it may be the Lord may look upon my 'affliction, and requite me good for this evil.'

An injury unanswered, in course, grows weary of itself, and dies away in a voluntary remorse.

In bad dispositions, capable of no restraint but fear, it has a different effect; the silent digestion of one wrong provokes a second.—He pursues him with the same invective;—'and as David and his men went 'by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side 'over against him; and cursed as he went, and cast 'dust at him.'

The insolence of base minds in success is boundless; and would scarce admit of a comparison, did not they themselves furnish us with one, in the degrees of their abjection, when evil returns upon them:—the same poor heart which excites ungenerous tempers to triumph over a fallen adversary, in some instances seems to exalt them above the point of courage,—sinks them in others, even below cowardice:—not unlike some little particles of matter struck off from the surface of dirt by sunshine,—dance and sport there whilst it lasts,—but the moment 'tis withdrawn—they fall down;—for dust they are,—and unto dust they will return;—whilst firmer and larger bodies preserve the

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stations which Nature has assigned them, subjected to laws which no change of weather can alter.

This last did not seem to be Shimei's case: in all David's prosperity, there is no mention made of him; —he thrust himself forward into the circle, and, possibly, was number'd amongst friends and well-wishers.

When the scene changes, and David's troubles force him to leave his house in despair,—Shimei is the first man we hear of who comes out against him.

The wheel turns round once more: Absalom is cast down, and David returns in peace.—Shimei suits his behaviour to the occasion, and is the first man who hastes to greet him;—and, had the wheel turn'd round a hundred times, Shimei, I dare say, in every period of its rotation, would have been uppermost.

O Shimei! would to Heaven, when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee, and not one of thy resemblance left! but ye have multiplied exceedingly, and replenished the earth; and if I prophesy rightly,—ye will in the end *subdue* it!

There is not a character in the world which has so bad an influence upon the affairs of it, as this of Shimei. Whilst power meets with honest checks, and the evils of life with honest refuge, the world will never be undone: but thou, Shimei, has sapp'd it at both extremes; for thou corruptest prosperity,—and 'tis thou who hast broken the heart of poverty; and, so long as worthless spirits can be ambitious ones, 'tis a character we shall never want. O! it infests the court,—the camp,—the cabinet!—it infests the church!—go where you will,—in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay.

—Haste, Shimei!—haste, or thou wilt be undone for

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ever.—Shimei girdeth up his loins and speedeth after him.—Behold the hand which governs every thing,—takes the wheels from off his chariot; so that he who driveth, driveth on heavily.—Shimei doubles his speed,—but 'tis the contrary way: he flies like the wind over a sandy desert, and the place thereof shall know it no more:—stay, Shimei! 'tis your patron,—your friend,—your benefactor; 'tis the man who has raised you from the dunghill!—'Tis all one to Shimei: Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune; marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to freezing cold upon his countenance, that the smile will admit of.—Is a cloud upon thy affairs?—see,—it hangs over Shimei's brow.—Hast thou been spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success?—Look not into the court-calendar;—the vacancy is filled up in Shimei's face,—Art thou in debt?—though not to Shimei,—no matter;—the worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent.

What then, Shimei, is the guilt of poverty so black,—is it of so general a concern, that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it?—When it lost every thing,—did it lose the right to pity too? or did he, who maketh poor as well as maketh rich, strip it of its natural powers to mollify the hearts and supple the temper of your race?—Trust me, ye have much to answer for; it is this treatment, which it has ever met with from spirits like yours, which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and shun it as the worst disgrace:—and what is it, I beseech you;—what is it that man will not do to keep clear of so sore an imputation and punishment?—is it not to fly from this that he 'rises early—late takes 'rest,—and eats the bread of carefulness?'—that he plots, contrives,—swears,—lies, shuffles,—puts on all

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shapes,—tries all garments,—wears them with this or that side outward,—just as it favours his escape?

They who have considered our nature, affirm, that shame and disgrace are two of the most insupportable evils of human life: the courage and spirits of many have mastered other misfortunes, and borne themselves up against them; but the wisest and best of souls have not been a match for these; and we have many a tragical instance on record, what greater evils have been run into merely to avoid this one.

Without this tax of infamy,—poverty, with all the burdens it lays upon our flesh,—so long as it is virtuous,—could never break the spirits of a man; all its hunger, and pain, and nakedness, are nothing to it; they have some counterpoise of good: and besides, they are directed by Providence, and must be submitted to: but these are afflictions not from the hand of God, or Nature:—'for they do come forth of the 'dust,' and most properly may be said 'to spring out of 'the ground;' and this is the reason they lay such stress upon our patience,—and in the end, create such a distrust of the world, as makes us look up,—and pray, 'Let me fall into thy hands, O God! but let me not 'fall into the hands of men.'

Agreeable to this was the advice of Eliphas to Job in the day of his distress:—'Acquaint thyself (said he) 'now with God.'—Indeed his poverty seemed to have left him no other friends; the swords of the Sabeans had frightened them away,—all but a few; and of what kind they were, the very proverb, of *Job's comforters*,—says enough.

It is an instance which gives one great concern for human nature, That a man, 'who always wept for him 'who was in trouble;—who never saw any perish for 'want of clothing;—who never suffered the stranger

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'to lodge in the street, but opened his door to the 'traveller;'—that a man of so good a character,— 'That he never caused the eyes of the widow to fail,— 'or had eaten his morsel by himself alone, and the 'fatherless had not eaten thereof;'—that such a man, the moment he fell into poverty, should have occasion to cry out for quarter,—'Have mercy upon me, O 'my friends! for the hand of God has touched me.' Gentleness and humanity, one would think, would melt the hardest heart, and charm the fiercest spirit; bind up the most violent hand, and still the most abusive tongue;—but the experiment failed in a stronger instance of him, whose meat and drink it was to do us good; and in pursuit of which, whose whole life was a continued scene of kindness and of insults, for which we must go back to the same explanation with which we set out,—and that is, the scandal of poverty.

'This fellow, we know not whence he is,'—was the popular cry of one part; and with those who seemed to know better, the query did not lessen the disgrace.— Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?—of Mary! great God of Israel! What!—of the meanest of thy people! 'for he had not regarded the low estate of his 'hand-maiden,'—and of the poorest, too! for she had not a lamb to offer, but was purified, as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle-dove.

That the Saviour of their nation could be poor, and not have where to lay his head,—was a crime never to be forgiven: and though the purity of his doctrine, and the works he had done in his support, were stronger arguments on its side, than his humiliation could be against it,—yet the offence still remained;—they looked for the redemption of Israel; but they would have it only in those dreams of power which filled their imagination.—

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Ye who weigh the worth of all things only in the goldsmith's balance,—was this religion for you?—a religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin and meagre, and whose principles and promises shewed more like the curses of the law than its blessings:—for they called for sufferings, and promised little but persecutions.

In truth, it is not easy for tribulation or distress, for nakedness or famine, to make many converts out of pride; or reconcile a worldly heart to the scorn and reproaches which were sure to be the portion of every one who believed a mystery so discredited by the world, and so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures.

But, to bring this sermon to its proper conclusion:—

If Astrea or Justice never finally took her leave of the world till the day that poverty first became ridiculous, it is matter of consolation, that the God of Justice is ever over us:—that whatever outrages the lowness of our condition may be exposed to from a mean and undiscerning world,—that we walk in the presence of the greatest and most generous of Beings, who is infinitely removed from cruelty and straitness of mind, and all those little and illiberal passions with which we hourly insult each other.

The worst part of mankind are not always to be conquered;—but if they are,—'tis by the imitation of these qualities which must do it:—'tis true, as I have shewn,—they may fail; but still all is not lost,—for if we conquer not the world, in the very attempts to do it, we shall at least conquer ourselves, and lay the foundation of our peace (where it ought to be) within our own hearts.

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SERMON XVII.

THE CASE OF HEZEKIAH AND THE MESSENGERS.*

2 KINGS, xx. 15.

And he said, What have they seen in thine house? and Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in my house have they seen; there is nothing amongst all my treasures that I have not shewn them.

——AND where was the harm, you'll say, in all this? 'An eastern prince, the son of Baladine, had sent 'messengers with presents as far as from Babylon, to 'congratulate Hezekiah upon the recovery from his 'sickness; and Hezekiah, who was a good prince, 'acted consistently with himself; "he received and '"entertained the men, and hearkened unto them;" 'and before he sent them away, he courteously shewed 'them all that was worth a stranger's curiosity in his 'house and his kingdom;—and in this, seemed only to 'have discharged himself of what urbanity or the 'etiquette of courts might require.' Notwithstanding this, in the verse which immediately follows the text, we find he had done amiss; and as a punishment for it, that all his riches, which his forefathers had laid up in store unto that day, were threatened to be carried away in triumph to Babylon:—the very place from whence the messengers had come.

* Preached before his Excellency the Earl of Hertford, at Paris, 1763.

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A hard return! and what his behaviour does not seem to have deserved. To set this matter in a clear light, it will be necessary to enlarge upon the whole story;—the reflections, which will arise out of it, as we go along, may help us;—at least, I hope they will be of use on their own account.

After the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians, we read in the beginning of this chapter, that Hezekiah was sick even unto death; and that God sends the prophet Isaiah, with the unwelcome message, 'That he 'should set his house in order; for that he should die, 'and not live.'

There are many instances of men, who have received such news with the greatest ease of mind, and even entertained the thoughts of it with smiles upon their countenances;—and this, either from strength of spirits and the natural cheerfulness of their temper,—or that they knew the world, and cared not for it,—or expected a better;—yet thousands of good men, with all the helps of philosophy, and against all the assurances of a well-spent life, that the change must be to their account,—upon the approach of death have still leaned towards this world, and wanted spirits and resolution to bear the shock of a separation from it for ever.

This, in some measure, seemed to have been Hezekiah's case; for though he had walked before God in truth, and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in his sight,—yet we find that the hasty summons afflicted him greatly;—that upon the delivery of the message he wept sore;—that he turned his face to the wall,—perhaps for the greater secrecy of his devotion, and that, by withdrawing himself thus from all external objects, he might offer up his prayer to his God with greater and more fervent attention.

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And he prayed, and said, O Lord! I beseech thee remember! —— O Hezekiah! how couldst thou fear that God had forgotten thee; or, how couldst thou doubt of his remembrance of thy integrity, when he called thee to receive its recompense!

But here it appears of what materials man is made. He pursues happiness;—and yet is so content with misery, that he would wander for ever in this dark vale of it,—and say, 'It is good, Lord, to be here, and 'to build tabernacles of rest!' and so long as we are clothed with flesh, and nature has so great a share within us, it is no wonder if that part claims its right, and pleads for the sweetness of life, notwithstanding all its cares and disappointments.

This natural weakness, no doubt, had its weight in Hezekiah's earnest prayer for life; and yet, from the success it met with, and the immediate change of God's purpose thereupon, it is hard to imagine but that it must have been accompanied with some meritorious and more generous motive; and if we suppose, as some have done, that he turned his face towards the wall because that part of his chamber looked towards the temple, the care of whose preservation lay next his heart, we may consistently enough give this sense to his prayer:

'O God! remember how I have walked before thee 'in truth;—how much I have done to rescue thy 'religion from error and falsehood;—thou knowest 'that the eyes of the world are fixed upon me, as one 'that hath forsaken their idolatry, and restored thy 'worship; that I stand in the midst of a crooked and 'corrupt generation, which looks through all my 'actions, and watches all events which happen to me: 'if now they shall see me snatched away in the midst 'of my days and service, how will thy great name

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'suffer in my extinction! Will not the heathen say, 'This is to serve the God of Israel!—How faithfully 'did Hezekiah walk before him!—What enemies did 'he bring upon himself, in too warmly promoting his 'worship! and now, when the hour of sickness and 'distress came upon him, and he most wanted the aid 'of his God,—behold how he was forsaken!'

It is not unreasonable to ascribe some such pious and more disinterested motive to Hezekiah's desire of life, from the issue and success of his prayer.—'For it came to pass, before Isaiah had gone out into 'the middle court, that the word of the Lord came 'to him, saying, Turn again and tell Hezekiah I have 'heard his prayer; I have seen his tears; and behold 'I will heal him.'

It was upon this occasion, as we read in the 12th verse of this chapter, that Baradock-baladan, son of Baladine king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: he had heard the fame of his sickness and recovery; for as the Chaldeans were great searchers into the secrets of Nature, especially into the motions of the celestial bodies, in all probability they had taken notice, at that distance, of the strange appearance of the shadow's returning ten degrees backwards upon their dials, and had inquired and learned upon what account, and in whose favour, such a sign was given: so that this astronomical miracle, besides the political motive which it would suggest of courting such a favourite of Heaven, had been sufficient by itself to have led a curious people as far as Jerusalem, that they might see the man for whose sake the sun had forsook his course.

And here we see how hard it is to stand the shock of prosperity; and how much truer a proof we give of our strength in that extreme of life, than in the other.

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In all the trials of adversity, we find that Hezekiah behaved well;—nothing unmanned him. When besieged by the Assyrian host, which shut him up in Jerusalem, and threatened his destruction,—he stood unshaken, and depended upon God's succour:—when cast down upon his bed of sickness, and threatened with death, he meekly turned his face towards the wall,—wept and prayed, and depended upon God's mercy:—but no sooner does prosperity return upon him, and the messengers from a far country come to pay the flattering homage due to his greatness and the extraordinary felicity of his life, but he turns giddy, and sinks under the weight of his good fortune; and with a transport unbecoming a wise man upon it, 'tis said, he hearkened unto the men, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold, the spices and the precious ointments, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures; that there was nothing in his house, nor in his dominions, that Hezekiah shewed them not; for though it is not expressly said here (though it is in the parallel passage in Chronicles)—nor is he charged by the prophet that he did this out of vanity and a weak transport of ostentation,—yet, as we are sure God could not be offended but where there was a real crime, we might reasonably conclude that this was his,—and that he who searches into the heart of man, beheld that his was corrupted with the blessings he had given him, and that it was just to make what was the occasion of his pride become the instrument of his punishment, by decreeing, That all the riches he had laid up in store until that day, should be carried away in triumph to Babylon: the very place from whence the messengers had come who had been eye-witnesses of his folly.

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'O Hezekiah! how couldst thou provoke God to 'bring this judgment upon thee? How could thy 'spirit, all meek and gentle as it was, have ever fallen 'into this snare? Were thy treasures rich as the 'earth,—what! was thy heart so vain as to be lifted 'up therewith? Was not all that was valuable in the 'world,—nay, was not heaven itself almost at thy 'command whilst thou wast humble? and, How was 'it that thou couldst barter away all this, for what 'was lighter than a bubble, and desecrate an action 'so full of courtesy and kindness as thine appeared to 'be, by suffering it to take its rise from so polluted 'a fountain?'

There is scarce any thing which the heart more unwillingly bears, than an analysis of this kind.

We are a strange compound; and something foreign from what charity would suspect, so eternally twists itself into what we do, that not only in momentous concerns, where interest lists under it all the powers of disguise,—but even in the most indifferent of our actions, not worth a fallacy, by force of habit, we continue it; so that whatever a man is about,—observe him,—he stands armed inside and out with two motives; an ostensible one for the world,—and another which he reserves for his own private use.—This, you may say, the world has no concern with: it might have been so; but by obtruding the wrong motive upon the world, and stealing from it a character, instead of winning one,—we give it a right, and a temptation along with it, to inquire into the affair.

The motives of the one for doing it, are often little better than the other for deserving it. Let us see if some social virtue may not be extracted from the errors of both the one and the other.

Vanity bids all her sons be generous and brave,—

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and her daughters chaste and courteous.—But why do we want her instructions?—Ask the comedian, who is taught a part he feels not.—

Is it that the principles of religion want strength, or that the real passion for what is good and worthy will not carry us high enough? God! thou knowest they carry us too high;—we want not to be,—but to seem!

Look out of your door,—take notice of that man: see what disquieting, intriguing, and shifting, he is content to go through, merely to be thought a man of plain dealing!—three grains of honesty would save him all this trouble:—alas! he has them not!—

Behold a second, under a show of piety, hiding the impurities of a debauched life!—he is just entering the house of God:—Would he was more pure,—or less pious!—but then he could not gain his point!

Observe a third going on almost in the same track. With what an inflexible sanctity of deportment he sustains himself as he advances!—every line in his face writes abstinence;—every stride looks like a check upon his desires. See, I beseech you, how he is cloked up with sermons, prayers, and sacraments; and so bemuffled with the externals of religion, that he has not a hand to spare for a worldly purpose!—he has armour at least:—Why does he put it on? Is there no serving God without all this? Must the garb of religion be extended so wide, to the danger of its rending?—Yes, truly, or it will not hide the secret:—and, What is that?

—That the saint has no religion at all!

But here comes Generosity; giving,—not to a decayed artist,—but to the Arts and Sciences themselves. —See,—he 'builds not a chamber in the wall apart 'for the prophet;' but whole schools and colleges for

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those who come after. Lord! how they will magnify his name!—'tis in capitals already; the first,—the highest, in the gilded rent-roll of every hospital and asylum.

—One honest tear shed in private over the unfortunate, is worth it all.

What a problematic set of creatures does simulation make us! Who would divine that all that anxiety and concern, so visible in the airs of one half of that great assembly, should arise from nothing else, but that the other half of it may think them to be men of consequence, penetration, parts, and conduct?—What a noise among the claimants about it! Behold Humility, out of mere pride!—and Honesty, almost out of knavery!—Chastity, never once in harm's way! and Courage, like a Spanish soldier upon an Italian stage,—a bladder full of wind!—Hark! that,—the sound of that trumpet,—let not my soldier run;—'tis some good Christian giving alms! O, Pity! thou gentlest of human passions! soft and tender are thy notes, and ill accord they with so loud an instrument!

Thus sometimes jars, and will for ever jar in these cases: Imposture is all dissonance, let what master soever of it undertake the part; let him harmonize and modulate it as he may, one tone will contradict another; and whilst we have ears to hear, we shall distinguish it:—'tis Truth only which is consistent and ever in harmony with itself: it sits upon our lips, like the natural notes of some melodies, ready to drop out, whether we will or no;—it racks no invention to let ourselves alone,—and needs fear no critic to have the same excellency in the heart which appears in the action.

It is a pleasing allusion the Scripture makes use

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of, in calling us sometimes a house, and sometimes a temple, according to the more or less exalted qualities of the spiritual guest which is lodged within us. Whether this is the precise ground of the distinction, I will not affirm: but thus much may be said, that, if we are temples, 'tis truth and singleness of heart which must make the dedication: 'tis this which must first distinguish them from the unhallowed pile, where dirty tricks and impositions are practised by the host upon the traveller, who tarries but for a moment, and returns not again.

We all take notice, how close and reserved people are;—but we do not take notice, at the same time, that every one may have something to conceal as well as ourselves; and that we are only marking the distances and taking the measures of self-defence from each other in the very instances we complain of. This is so true, that there is scarce any character so rare as a man of real, open, and generous integrity, —who carries his heart in his hand,—who says the thing he thinks, and does the thing he pretends. Though no one can dislike the character,—yet Discretion generally shakes her head,—and the world soon lets him into the reason.

'O that I had in the wilderness a lodging of way-'faring men! that I might leave such a people, and 'go from them!'—Where is the man of a nice sense of truth and strong feelings, from whom the duplicity of the world has not at one time or other wrung the same wish? and where lies the wilderness to which some one has not fled, from the same melancholy impulse?

Thus much for those who give occasion to be thought ill of.—Let us say a word or two unto those who take it.

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But to avoid all common-place cant as much as I can on this head,—I will forbear to say, because I do not think it, that 'tis a breach of Christian charity to think or speak evil of our neighbour, &c.

—We cannot avoid it: our opinions must follow the evidence; and we are perpetually in such engagements and situations, that 'tis our duty to speak what our opinions are; — but God forbid that this ever should be done but from its best motive,—the sense of what is due to virtue, governed by discretion, and the utmost fellow-feeling. Were we to go on otherwise, beginning with the great broad cloak of Hypocrisy, and so down through all its little trimmings and facings, tearing away, without mercy, all that look'd seemly,—we should leave but a tatter'd world of it.

But I confine what I have to say to a character less equivocal, and which takes up too much room in the world:—it is that of those who, from a general distrust of all that looks disinterested, finding nothing to blame in an action, and perhaps much to admire in it, — immediately fall foul upon its motives: 'Does Job serve God for nought?' — What a vile insinuation! Besides, the question was not, Whether Job was a rich man or a poor man?—but, Whether he was a man of integrity, or no? and the appearances were strong on his side. Indeed it might have been otherwise; it was possible Job might be insincere, and the Devil took the advantage of the dye for it.

It is a bad picture, and done by a terrible master; and yet we are always copying it! Does a man, from a real conviction of heart, forsake his vices?—the position is not to be allowed. No; his vices have forsaken him.

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Does a pure virgin fear God and say her prayers? —She is in her climacteric.

Does humanity clothe and educate the unknown orphan?—Poverty! thou hast no genealogies!—See! is he not the father of the child? Thus do we rob heroes of the best part of their glory,—their virtue. Take away the motive of the act, you take away all that is worth having in it;—wrest it unto ungerous ends, you load the virtuous man who did it with infamy. Undo it all,—I beseech you: give him back his honour,—restore the jewel you have taken from him—replace him in the eye of the world:

——it is too late!

It is painful to utter the reproaches which should come in here. — I will trust them with yourselves; in coming from that quarter, they will more naturally produce such fruits as will not set your teeth on edge;—for they will be the fruits of love and goodwill, to the praise of God and the happiness of the world;—which I wish!

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SERMON XVIII.

THE LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE.

JUDGES, xix. 1, 2, 3.

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim, who took unto him a concubine.

—A CONCUBINE!—but the text accounts for it; 'for 'in those days there was no king in Israel;' and the Levite, you will say, like every other man in it, did what was right in his own eyes;—and so, you may add, did his concubine too,—'for she 'played the whore against him, and went away.'

—Then shame and grief go with her; and whereever she seeks a shelter, may the hand of Justice shut the door against her!

Not so; for she went unto her father's house in Bethlehem-judah, and was with him four whole months.—Blessed interval for meditation upon the fickleness and vanity of this world and its pleasures! I see the holy man upon his knees,—with hands compressed to his bosom, and with uplifted eyes, thanking Heaven that the object which had so long shared his affections was fled!

The text gives a different picture of his situation; 'for he arose and went after her, to speak friendly 'to her, and to bring her back again, having his

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'servant with him, and a couple of asses; and she 'brought him unto her father's house; and when 'the father of the damsel saw him he rejoiced to 'meet him.'

—A most sentimental groupe! you'll say; and so it is, my good commentator, the world talks of every thing. Give but the outlines of a story,—let Spleen or Prudery snatch the pencil, and they will finish it with so many hard strokes, and with so dirty a colouring, that Candour and Courtesy will sit in torture as they look at it.—Gentle and virtuous spirits! ye who know not what it is to be rigid interpreters, but of your own failings,—to you I address myself, the unhired advocates for the conduct of the misguided,—Whence is it that the world is not more jealous of your office? How often must ye repeat it, 'That such a one's doing so or so,' is not sufficient evidence by itself to overthrow the accused!—that our actions stand surrounded with a thousand circumstances which do not present themselves at first sight!—that the first springs and motives which impell'd the unfortunate, lie deeper still!—and, that of the millions which every hour are arraign'd, thousands of them may have err'd merely from the *head*, and been actually outwitted into evil!—and, even when from the *heart*,—that the difficulties and temptations under which they acted, the force of the passions,—the suitableness of the object, and the many struggles of Virtue before she fell,—may be so many appeals from Justice to the judgment-seat of Pity!

Here then let us stop a moment, and give the story of the Levite and his concubine a second hearing. Like all others, much of it depends upon the telling; and, as the Scripture has left us no kind of comment upon it, 'tis a story on which the heart cannot be at

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a loss for what to say, or the imagination for what to suppose;—the danger is, Humanity may say too much.

'And it came to pass in those days, when there 'was no king in Israel, that a certain Levite so-'journing on the side of Mount Ephraim, took unto 'himself a concubine.'

O Abraham! thou father of the faithful! if this was wrong,—Why didst thou set so ensnaring an example before the eyes of thy descendants? and, Why did the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and Jacob, bless so often the seed of such intercourses, and promise to multiply and make princes come out of them?

God can dispense with his own laws: and accordingly we find the holiest of the patriarchs and others in Scripture, whose hearts cleaved most unto God, accommodating themselves as well as they could to the dispensation;—That Abraham had Hagar;—that Jacob, besides his two wives, Rachel and Leah, took also unto him Zilpah and Bilhah, from whom many of the tribes descended;—that David had seven wives and ten concubines;—Rehoboam, sixty;—and that, in whatever cases it became reproachable, it seemed not so much the thing itself as the abuse of it, which made it so. This was remarkable in that of Solomon, whose excess became an insult upon the privileges of mankind; for, by the same plan of luxury, which made it necessary to have forty thousand stalls of horses,—he had unfortunately miscalculated his other wants, and so had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines.

Wise,—deluded man! was it not that thou madest some amends for thy bad practice by thy good preaching, what had become of thee!—Three hun-

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dred!——But let us turn aside, I beseech you, from so bad a stumbling-block.

The Levite had but one. The Hebrew word imports a woman a concubine, or a wife a concubine, to distinguish her from the more infamous species who came under the roofs of the licentious without principle. Our annotators tell us, That in Jewish *œconomics*, these differ'd little from the wife, except in some outward ceremonies and stipulations, but agreed with her in all the true essences of marriage, and gave themselves up to the husband (for so he is called) with faith plighted, with sentiments, and with affection.

Such a one the Levite wanted to share his solitude, and fill up that uncomfortable blank in the heart in such a situation; for, notwithstanding all we meet with in books, in many of which, no doubt, there are a good many handsome things said upon the sweets of retirement, &c.—yet still, 'it is not good 'for man to be alone:' nor can all which the cold-hearted pedant stuns our ears with upon the subject ever give one answer of satisfaction to the mind: in the midst of the loudest vauntings of philosophy, Nature will have her yearnings for society and friendship;—a good heart wants some object to be kind to;—and the best part of our blood, and the purest of our spirits, suffer most under the destitution.

Let the torpid monk seek Heaven comfortless and alone.—God speed him! For my own part, I fear I should never so find the way. Let me be wise and religious,—but let me be man. Wherever thy providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to thee,—give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, How our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down!—to whom I may

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say, How fresh is the face of Nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!

Alas! with bitter herbs, like his passover, did the Levite eat them: for as they thus walked the path of life together,—she wantonly turn'd aside unto another, and fled from him.

It is the mild and quiet half of the world who are generally outraged and borne down by the other half of it: but in this they have the advantage; whatever be the sense of their wrongs, that Pride stands not so watchful a sentinel over their forgiveness, as it does in the breasts of the fierce and froward. We should all of us, I believe, be more forgiving than we are, would the world but give us leave; but it is apt to impose its ill-offices in remissions, especially of this kind. The truth is, it has its laws, to which the heart is not always a party; and acts so like an unfeeling engine in all cases without distinction, that it requires all the firmness of the most settled humanity to bear up against it.

Many a bitter conflict would the Levite have to sustain within himself,—his concubine—and the sentiments of his tribe, upon the wrong done him:—much matter for pleading, and many an embarrassing account on all sides. In a period of four whole months, every passion would take its empire by turns; and in the ebbs and flows of the less unfriendly ones, Pity would find some moments to be heard,—Religion herself would not be silent,—Charity would have much to say; and thus attun'd, every object he beheld on the borders of Mount Ephraim,—every grot and grove he pass'd by, would solicit the recollection of former kindness, and awaken an advocate in her behalf, more powerful than them all.

'I grant,—I grant it all,'—he would cry,—'tis foul!

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'tis faithless!—but, Why is the door of mercy to be 'shut for ever against it? and, Why is it to be the only 'sad crime that the injured may not remit, or reason, 'or imagination pass over without a scar?—Is it the 'blackest? In what catalogue of human offences is it 'so marked? or, Is it, that of all others, 'tis a blow 'most grievous to be endured?—The heart cries out, 'It is so: but let me ask my own, What passions are 'they which give edge and force to this weapon which 'has struck me? and, Whether it is not my own pride, 'as much as my virtues, which at this moment excites 'the greatest part of that intolerable anguish in the 'wound which I am laying to her charge? But, mer-'ciful Heaven! was it otherwise, why is an unhappy 'creature of thine to be persecuted by me with so 'much cruel revenge and rancorous despite as my first 'transport called for?—Have faults no extenuations? 'Makes it nothing, that when the trespass was com-'mitted, she forsook the partner of her guilt, and fled 'directly to her father's house? And is there no differ-'ence betwixt one propensely going out of the road 'and continuing there, through depravity of will,—and 'a hapless wanderer straying by delusion, and warily 'treading back her steps? — Sweet is the look of 'sorrow for an offence, in a heart determined never to 'commit it more!—Upon that altar only could I offer 'up my wrongs. Cruel is the punishment which an 'ingenuous mind will take upon itself from the re-'morse of so hard a trespass against me; and if that 'will not balance the account,—just God! let me for-'give the rest. Mercy well becomes the heart of all 'thy creatures!—but most of thy servant, a Levite, 'who offers up so many daily sacrifices to thee, for the 'transgressions of thy people.—

—'But to little purpose,' he would add, 'have I

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'served at thy altar, where my business was to sue for 'mercy, had I not learnt to practice it!'

Peace and happiness rest upon the head and heart of every man who can thus think!

'So he arose and went after her, to speak friendly 'unto her:'—in the original—*to speak to her heart;*—to apply to their former endearments,—and to ask, How she could be so unkind to him, and so very unkind to herself?—

—Even the upbraidings of the quiet and relenting are sweet: not like the strivings of the fierce and inexorable, who bite and devour all who have thwarted them in their way;—but they are calm and courteous, like the spirit which watches over their character. How could such a temper woo the damsel, and not bring her back? or, How could the father of the damsel, in such a scene, have a heart open to any impressions but those mentioned in the text;—'That when he 'saw him, he rejoiced to meet him;"—urged his stay from day to day, with that most irresistible of all invitations,—'Comfort thy heart, and tarry all night, and 'let thine heart be merry.'

If Mercy and Truth thus met together in settling this account, Love would surely be of the party: great,—great is its power in cementing what has been broken, and wiping out wrongs even from the memory itself! and so it was,—for the Levite arose up, and with him his concubine and his servant, and they departed.

It serves no purpose to pursue the story further; the catastrophe is horrid, and would lead us beyond the particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of it; and that is, to discredit rash judgment, and illustrate from the manner of conducting this drama, the courtesy which the *dramatis personæ* of every other

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piece may have a right to. Almost one half of our time is spent in telling and hearing evil of one another;—some unfortunate knight is always upon the stage;—and every hour brings forth something strange and terrible to fill up our discourse and our astonishment, 'How people 'can be so foolish'!—and 'tis well if the compliment ends there; so that there is not a social virtue for which there is so constant a demand,—or, consequently, so well worth cultivating, as that which opposes this unfriendly current. Many and rapid are the springs which feed it; and various and sudden, God knows, are the gusts which render it unsafe to us in this short passage of our life. Let us make the discourse as serviceable as we can, by tracing some of the most remarkable of them up to their source.

And, first, there is one miserable inlet to this evil, and which, by the way, if speculation is supposed to precede practice, may have been derived, for aught I know, from some of our busiest enquirers after nature;—and that is, when with more zeal than knowledge we account for phenomena before we are sure of their existence.—'It is not the manner of the Romans, to 'condemn any man to death,' (much less to be martyred) said Festus;—'and doth our law judge any man 'before it hear him, and know what he doth?' cried Nicodemus: 'and he that answereth, or determineth a 'matter before he has heard it,—it is folly, and a 'shame unto him.'—We are generally in such a haste to make our own decrees, that we pass over the justice of these;—and then the scene is so changed by it, that 'tis our own folly only which is real, and that of the accused which is imaginary: thro' too much precipitancy it will happen so; and then the jest is spoil'd,—or we have criticised our own shadow.

A second way is, when the process goes on more or-

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derly, and we begin with getting information;—but do it from those suspected evidences, against which our Saviour warns us when he bids us 'Not to judge 'according to appearance.'—In truth, 'tis behind these that most of the things which blind human judgment lie concealed;—and, on the contrary, there are many things which appear to be,—which are not: 'Christ 'came eating and drinking,—behold a wine-bibber!' —he sat with sinners,—he was their friend:—in many cases of which kind, Truth, like a modest matron, scorns art;—and disdains to press herself forward into the circle to be seen:—ground sufficient for Suspicion to draw up the libel,—for Malice to give the torture, —or rash Judgment to start up and pass a final sentence.

A third way is, when the facts which denote misconduct are less disputable, but are commented upon with an asperity of censure, which a humane or a gracious temper would spare. An abhorrence against what is criminal, is so fair a plea for this, and looks so like virtue in the face, that in a sermon against rash judgment, it would be unseasonable to call it in question,— and yet, I declare, in the fullest torrent of exclamations which the guilty can deserve, that the simple apostrophe, 'Who made me to differ?—why was not I an 'example?' would touch my heart more, and give me a better earnest of the commentators,—than the most corrosive period you could add. The punishment of the unhappy, I fear, is enough without it:—and were it not,—'tis piteous the tongue of a Christian (whose religion is all candour and courtesy) should be made the executioner! We find in the discourse between Abraham and the rich man, though the one was in Heaven and the other in Hell, yet still the patriarch treated him with mild language:—'Son! Son, remember that

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'thou in thy life-time,' &c.—And in the dispute about the body of Moses, between the Archangel and the Devil (himself), St. Jude tells us, he durst not bring a railing accusation against him;—'twas unworthy his high character,—and, indeed, might have been impolitic too; for if he had (as one of our divines notes upon the passage), the Devil had been too hard for him at railing;—'twas his own weapon;—and the basest spirits, after his example, are the most expert at it.

This leads me to the observation of a fourth cruel inlet into this evil; and that is, the desire of being thought men of wit and parts; and the vain expectation of coming honestly by the title, by shrewd and sarcastic reflections upon whatever is done in the world. This is setting up trade upon the broken stock of other people's failings,—perhaps their misfortunes: ——so much good may it do them with what honour they can get,—the furthest extent of which, I think, is to be praised, as we do some sauces, with tears in our eyes. It is a commerce most illiberal; and as it requires no vast capital, too many embark in it; and so long as there are bad passions to be gratified, and bad heads to judge,—with such it may pass for wit, or at least, like some vile relation whom all the family is ashamed of, claim kindred with it, even in better companies. Whatever be the degree of its affinity, it has helped to give wit a bad name; as if the main essence of it was satire:—certainly there is a difference between Bitterness and Saltness;—that is,—between the malignity and the festivity of wit:—the one is a mere quickness of apprehension, void of humanity,—and is a talent of the Devil: the other comes from the Father of Spirits, so pure and abstracted from persons, that willingly it hurts no man; or, if it touches upon an indecorum, 'tis with that dexterity of true genins,

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which enables him rather to give a new colour to the absurdity, and let it pass.—He may smile at the obelisk raised to another's fame;—but the malignant wit will level it at once with the ground, and build his own upon the ruins of it.—

What then, ye rash censurers of the world! Have ye no mansions for your credit, but those from whence ye have extruded the right owners? Are there no regions for you to shine in, that ye descend for it into the low caverns of abuse and crimination? Have ye no seats but those of the scornful to sit down in? If Honour has mistook his road, or the Virtues, in their excesses, have approached too near the confines of Vice, are they, therefore, to be cast down the precipice? Must Beauty for ever be trampled upon in the dirt for one—one false step? And shall no one virtue or good quality, out of the thousand the fair penitent may have left,—shall not one of them be suffered to stand by her?—Just God of Heaven and earth!

—But thou art merciful, loving, and righteous, and lookest down with pity upon these wrongs thy servants do unto each other. Pardon us, we beseech thee, for them, and all our transgressions! let it not be remembered that we were brethren of the same flesh, the same feelings and infirmities! O my God! write it not down in thy book that thou madest us merciful after thy own image!—that thou hast given us a religion so courteous,—so good temper'd,—that every precept of it carries a balm along with it to heal the soreness of our natures and sweeten our spirits, that we might live with such kind intercourse in this world, as will fit us to exist together in a better!

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SERMON XIX.

FELIX'S BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS PAUL EXAMINED.

ACTS, xxiv. 26.

He hoped also, that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.

A NOBLE object to take up the consideration of the Roman governor!

'He hoped that money should have been given 'him;'—for what end? To enable him to judge betwixt right and wrong?—and, from whence was it to be wrung? From the poor scrip of a disciple of the carpenter's son, who left nothing to his followers but poverty and sufferings!—

And was this Felix?—the great, the noble Felix.—Felix the happy!—the gallant Felix, who kept Drusilla!—Could he do this?—Base passion,—what canst thou not make us do!

Let us consider the whole transaction.

Paul, in the beginning of this chapter, had been accused before Felix, by Tertullus, of very grievous crimes;—of being a pestilent fellow,—a mover of seditions, and a profaner of the temple, &c.—To which accusations, the apostle having liberty from Felix to reply, he makes his defence, from the 10th

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to the 22nd verse, to this purport:—He shews him, first, that the whole charge was destitute of all proof; which he openly challenges them to produce against him, if they had it:—that, on the contrary, he was so far from being the man Tertullus had represented, that the very principles of the religion with which he then stood charged,—and which they called Heresy, led him to be the most unexceptionable in his conduct, by the continual exercise which it demanded of him, of having a conscience void of offence at all times, both towards God and man:—that consistently with this, his adversaries had neither found him in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, either in the synagogue, or in the city;—for this he appeals to themselves:—that it was but twelve days since he came up from Jerusalem for to worship:—that during that time, when he purified in the temple, he did it as became him, without noise, without tumult: this he calls upon the Jews who came from Asia, and were eye-witnesses of his behaviour, to attest;—and, in a word, he urges the whole defence before Felix in so strong a manner, and with such plain and natural arguments of his innocence, as to leave no colour for his adversaries to reply.

There was, however, still one adversary in this court,—though silent, yet not satisfied.—

—Spare thy eloquence, Tertullus! roll up the charge: a more notable orator than thyself is risen up,—'tis Avarice; and that too in the most fatal place for the prisoner it could have taken possession of;—'tis in the heart of the man who judges him.

If Felix believed Paul innocent, and acted accordingly;—that is, released him without reward,—this subtle advocate told him he would lose one of the

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profits of his employment;—and if he acknowledged the faith of Christ, which Paul occasionally explained in his defence,—it told him he might lose the employment itself;—so that, notwithstanding the character of the Apostle appeared (as it was) most spotless, and the faith he professed so very clear, that as he urged it the heart gave its consent,—yet at the same time, the passions rebelled; and so strong an interest was formed thereby against the first impressions in favour of the man and his cause, that both were dismissed;—the one to a more convenient hearing, which never came; the other to the hardships of a prison for two whole years,—hoping as the text informs us, that money should have been given him: and even at the last, when he left the province, willing to do the Jews a pleasure,—that is,—to serve his interests in another shape, with all the conviction upon his mind that he had done nothing worthy of bonds, he, nevertheless, left the holy man bound, and consigned over to the hopeless prospect of ending his days in the same state of confinement in which he had ungenerously left him.

One would imagine, as covetousness is a vice not naturally cruel in itself, that there must certainly have been a mixture of other motives in the governor's breast, to account for a proceeding so contrary to humanity and his own conviction: and could it be of use to raise conjectures upon it, there seems but too probable grounds for such a supposition. It seems that Drusilla, whose curiosity, upon a double account, had lead her to hear Paul,—(for she was a daughter of Abraham, as well as of Eve)—was a character which might have figured very well even in our own times! for, as Josephus tells us, she had left the Jew her husband; and, without any pretence in

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their law to justify a divorce, had given herself up without ceremony to Felix; for which cause, though she is here called his wife, she was, in reason and justice, the wife of another man,—and consequently lived in an open state of adultery;—so that when Paul, in explaining the faith of Christ, took occasion to argue upon the morality of the Gospel,—and urged the eternal laws of justice, the unchangeable obligations to temperance, of which chastity was a branch,—it was scarce possible to frame his discourse so (had he wished to temporize) but that either her interest or her love must have taken offence: and though we do not read, like Felix, she trembled at the account, 'tis yet natural to imagine she was affected with other passions, of which the apostle might feel the effects;—and 'twas well he suffered no more, if two such violent enemies as lust and avarice were combined against him.

But this by the way; for as the text seems only to acknowledge one of these motives, it is not our business to assign the other.

It is observable, that this same apostle, speaking, in the Epistle to Timothy, of the ill-effects of this same ruling passion, affirms that it is the root of all evil; and I make no doubt that the remembrance of his own sufferings had no small share in the severity of the reflection.—Infinite are the examples where the love of money is only a subordinate and ministerial passion, exercised for the support of some other vices: and 'tis generally found, when there is either ambition, prodigality, or lust, to be fed by it, that it then rages with least mercy and discretion; in which cases, strictly speaking, it is not the root of other evils,—but other evils are the root of it.

This forces me to recall what I have said upon

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covetousness, as a vice not naturally cruel: it is not apt to represent itself to our imaginations, at first sight, under that idea; we consider it only as a mean, worthless turn of mind, incapable of judging or doing what is right: but as it is a vice which does not always set up for itself,—to know truly what it is in this respect, we must know what masters it serves:—they are many, and of various casts and humours; and each one lends it something of his own complexional tint and character.

This, I suppose, may be the cause that there is a greater and more whimsical mystery in the love of money, than in the darkest and most nonsensical problem that ever was pored on.

Even at the best, and when the passion seems to seek nothing more than its own amusement,—there is little, very little, I fear, to be said for its humanity.—It may be a sport to the miser;—but consider,—it must be death and destruction to others.—The moment this sordid humour begins to govern,—farewell all honest and natural affection! farewell all he owes to parents, to children, to friends!—How fast the obligations vanish! see,—he is now stripped of all feelings whatever:—the shrill cry of Justice,—and the low lamentation of humble Distress, are notes equally beyond his compass!—Eternal God! see!—he passes by one whom thou hast just bruised, without one pensive reflection!—he enters the cabin of the widow whose husband and child thou hast taken to thyself,—exacts his bond without a sigh!—Heaven! if I am to be tempted,—let it be by glory,—by ambition,—by some generous and manly vice:—if I must fall, let it be by some passion which thou hast planted in my nature, which shall not harden my heart, but leave me room at last to retreat and come back to thee!

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It would be easy here to add the common arguments which reason offers against this vice: but they are so well understood, both in matter and form,—it is needless.

I might cite to you what Seneca says upon it;—but the misfortune is, that at the same time he was writing against riches, he was enjoying a great estate, and using every means to make that estate greater!

With infinite pleasure might a preacher enrich his discourse in this place, by weaving into it all the smart things which ancient or modern wits have said upon the love of money:—he might inform you,

—'That poverty wants something:—that covetous-'ness wanteth all!'

'That a miser can only be said to have riches as a 'sick man has a fever, which holds and tyrannizes 'over the man,—not he over it!'

'That covetousness is the shirt of the soul,—the last 'vice it parts with!'

'That nature is content with few things:—or, that 'nature is never satisfied at all,' &c.

The reflection of our Saviour, 'That the life of man 'consisteth not in the abundance of the things which 'he possesseth,'—speaks more to the heart;—and the single hint of the camel, and what a very narrow passage he has to go through,—has more coercion in it than all the see-saws of philosophy.

I shall endeavour therefore to draw such other reflections from this piece of sacred history as are applicable to human life,—and more likely to be of use.

There is nothing generally in which our happiness and honour are more nearly concerned, than in forming true notions both of men and things; for in proportion as we think rightly of them, we approve

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ourselves to the world;—and as we govern ourselves by such judgments, so we secure our peace and well-being in passing through it: the false steps and miscarriages in life, issuing from a defect in this capital point, are so many and fatal, that there can be nothing more instructive than an inquiry into the causes of this perversion, which often appears so very gross in us, that were you to take a view of the world,—see what notions it entertains, and by what considerations it is governed,—you would say of the mistakes of human judgment, what the prophet does of the folly of human actions,—'That we were wise to do evil; but to judge 'rightly, had no understanding.'

That in many dark and abstracted questions of mere speculation, we should err,—is not strange; we live among mysteries and riddles; and almost every thing which comes in our way, in one light or other, may be said to baffle our understandings,—yet seldom so as to mistake in extremities, and take one contrary for another.—'Tis very rare, for instance, that we take the virtue of a plant to be hot, when it is extremely cold; —or, that we try the experiment of opium to keep us waking:—yet this we are continually attempting in the conduct of life, as well as in the great ends and measures of it. That such wrong determinations in us do arise from any defect of judgment inevitably misleading us,—would reflect dishonour upon God; as if he had made and sent men into the world on purpose to play the fool. His all-bountiful hand made his judgment, like his heart, upright; and the instances of his sagacity, in other things, abundantly confirm it: we are led therefore in course to a supposition, that in all inconsistent instances there is a secret bias, somehow or other, hung upon the mind, which turns it aside from reason and truth.

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What this is, if we do not care to search for it in ourselves, we shall find it registered in this transaction of Felix: and we may depend, that in all wrong judgments whatever, in such plain cases as this, that the same explanation must be given of it which is given in the text,—namely, That it is some selfish consideration —some secret dirty engagement with some little appetite, which does us so much dishonour.

The judgments of the more disinterested and impartial of us, receive no small tincture from our affections: we generally consult them in all doubtful points; and it happens well if the matter in question is not almost settled before the arbitrator is called into the debate.—But in the more flagrant instances, where the passions govern the whole man, 'tis melancholy to see the office to which Reason, the great prerogative of his nature, is reduced, serving the lower appetites in the dishonest drudgery of finding out arguments to justify the present pursuit.

To judge rightly of our own worth, we should retire a little from the world, to see all its pleasures,—and pains too, in their proper size and dimensions.—This, no doubt, was the reason St. Paul, when he intended to convert Felix, began his discourse upon the day of judgment, on purpose to take the heart off from this world and its pleasures, which dishonour the understanding so, as to turn the wisest of men into fools and children.

If you enlarge your observations upon this plan, you will find where the evil lies which has supported those desperate opinions which have so long divided the Christian world,—and are likely to divide it for ever.

Consider popery well; you will be convinced that the truest definition which can be given of it is,—

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That it is a pecuniary system, well contrived to operate upon men's passions and weakness, whilst their pockets are o'picking! Run through all the points of difference between us;—and when you see that, in every one of them, they serve the same end which Felix had in view, either of money or power, there is little room left to doubt whence the cloud arises which is spread over the understanding.

If this reasoning is conclusive with regard to those who merely differ from us in religion,—let us try if it will not hold good with regard to those who have none at all;—or rather, who affect to treat all persuasions of it with ridicule alike. Thanks to good sense, good manners, and a more enlarged knowledge, this humour is going down, and seems to be settling at present chiefly amongst the inferior classes of the people,—where it is likely to rest. As for the lowest ranks, though they are apt enough to follow the modes of their betters, yet are they not likely to be struck with this one, of making merry with that which is their consolation; they are too serious a set of poor people ever heartily to enter into it.—

There is enough, however, of it in the world to say, that this all-sacred system, which holds the world in harmony and peace, is too often the first object that the giddy and inconsiderate make choice of to try the temper of their wits upon. Now, of the numbers who make this experiment, do you believe that one in a thousand does it from conviction,—or from arguments which a course of study—much cool reasoning, and a sober inquiry into antiquity, and the true merits of the question, have furnished him with?—The years and way of life of the most forward of these, lead us to a different explanation.

Religion, which lays so many restraints upon us,

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is a troublesome companion to those who will lay no restraints upon themselves;—and for this reason there is nothing more common to be observed, than that the little arguments and cavils which such men have gathered up against it in the early part of their lives,—how considerable soever they may have appeared, when viewed through their passions and prejudices, which give an unnatural turn to all objects, —yet, when the edge of appetite has been worn down, and the heat of pursuit pretty well over,—and reason and judgment have got possession of their empire,—

—They seldom fail of bringing the lost sheep back to his fold.

May God bring us all there! Amen.

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SERMON XX.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE, xv. 13.

I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight; and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

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SERMON XX.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE, XV. 13.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all he had together, and took his journey into a far country.

I KNOW not whether the remark is to our honour or otherwise, that lessons of wisdom have never such a power over us as when they are wrought into the heart through the ground-work of a story which engages the passions. Is it that we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon? or, Is the heart so in love with deceit, that, where a true report will not reach it, we must cheat it with a fable, in order to come at truth?

Whether this parable of the Prodigal (for so it is usually called) is really such,—or built upon some story known at that time in Jerusalem, is not much to the purpose; it is given us to enlarge upon, and turn to the best moral account we can.

'A certain man,' says our Saviour, 'had two sons; 'and the younger of them said to his father, Give 'me the portion of goods which falls to me: and he 'divided unto them his substance. And not many 'days after, the younger son gathered all together, 'and took his journey into a far country, and there 'wasted his substance with riotous living.'

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The account is short: the interesting and pathetic passages with which such a transaction would be necessarily connected, are left to be supplied by the heart:—the story is silent,—but Nature is not:—much kind advice, and many a tender expostulation, would fall from the father's lips, no doubt, upon this occasion.

He would dissuade his son upon the folly of so rash an enterprise, by shewing him the dangers of the journey,—the inexperience of his age,—the hazards his life, his fortune, his virtue, would run, without a guide, without a friend: he would tell him of the many snares and temptations which he had to avoid or encounter at every step,—the pleasures which would solicit him in every luxurious court,—the little knowledge he could gain,—except that of evil: he would speak of the seduction of women,—their charms,—their poisons;—what hapless indulgences he might give way to, when far from restraint, and the check of giving his father pain.

The dissuasive would but inflame his desire.—He gathers all together.

—— I see the picture of his departure;—the camels and asses loaden with his substance, detached on one side of the piece, and already on their way:—the prodigal son standing on the fore-ground, with a forced sedateness, struggling against the fluttering movement of joy, upon his deliverance from restraint:—the elder brother holding his hand, as if unwilling to let it go:—the father,—sad moment! with a firm look, covering a prophetic sentiment, 'that all would not go well with his child,'—approaching to embrace him and bid him adieu.—Poor inconsiderate youth! From whose arms art thou flying? From what a shelter art thou going forth into the storm? Art thou weary of a father's

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affection,—of a father's care? or, Hopest thou to find a warmer interest, a truer counsellor, or a kinder friend in a land of strangers, where youth is made a prey, and so many thousands are confederated to deceive them, and live by their spoils?

We will seek no farther than this idea for the extravagances by which the prodigal son added one unhappy example to the number: his fortune wasted,—the followers of it fled in course,—the wants of nature remain,—the hand of God gone forth against him;—'for when he had spent all, a mighty famine 'arose in that country.' Heaven! have pity upon the youth, for he is in hunger and distress;—stray'd out of the reach of a parent, who counts every hour of his absence with anguish;—cut off from all his tender offices by his folly,—and from relief and charity from others, by the calamity of the times!

Nothing so powerfully calls home the mind as distress! the tense fibre then relaxes,—the soul retires to itself,—sits pensive and susceptible of right impressions: if we have a friend, 'tis then we think of him; if a benefactor, at that moment all his kindnesses press upon our mind.—Gracious and bountiful God! Is it not for this that they who in their prosperity forget thee, do yet remember and return to thee in the hour of their sorrow? When our heart is in heaviness, upon whom can we think but thee, who knowest our necessities afar off,—puttest all our tears in thy bottle,—seest every careful thought,—hearest every sigh and melancholy groan we utter!

Strange!—that we should only begin to think of God with comfort, when with joy and comfort we can think of nothing else!

Man surely is a compound of riddles and contradictions: by the law of his nature he avoids pain,

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and yet, 'unless he suffers in the flesh, he will not 'cease from sin,' though it is sure to bring pain and misery upon his head for ever.

Whilst all went pleasurably on with the prodigal, we hear not one word concerning his father;—no pang of remorse for the sufferings in which he had left him, or resolution of returning, to make up the account of his folly:—his first hour of distress seemed to be his first hour of wisdom.—'When he came to 'himself, he said, "How many hired servants of my '"father have bread enough and to spare, whilst I '"perish!"'

Of all the terrors of nature, that of one day or other dying by hunger, is the greatest; and it is wisely wove into our frame, to awaken man to industry, and call forth his talents: and though we seem to go on carelessly, sporting with it, as we do with other terrors,—yet he that sees this enemy fairly, and in his most frightful shape, will need no long remonstrance to make him turn out of the way to avoid him.

It was the case of the prodigal;—he arose to go to his father.

——Alas! How should he tell his story?—Ye who have trod this round, tell me in what words he shall give into his father the sad *items* of his extravagance.

——The feasts and banquets which he gave to whole cities in the east,—the costs of Asiatic rarities,—and of Asiatic cooks to dress them;—the expenses of singing men and singing women,—the flute, the harp, the sackbut, and of all kinds of music;—the dress of the Persian courts, how magnificent! their slaves, how numerous!—their chariots, their horses, their palaces, their furniture, what immense sums they

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had devoured!—what expectations from strangers of condition! what exactions!

How shall the youth make his father comprehend that he was cheated at Damascus by one of the best men in the world;—that he had lent a part of his substance to a friend at Nineveh, who had fled off with it to the Ganges;—that a whore of Babylon had swallowed his best pearl, and anointed the whole city with his balm of Gilead;—that he had been sold by a man of honour for twenty shekels of silver to a worker in graven images;—that the images he had purchased had profited him nothing;—that they could not be transported across the wilderness, and had been burnt with fire at Shusan;—the* apes and peacocks, which he had sent for from Tarsis, lay dead upon his hands; and that the mummies had not been dead long enough, which had been brought him out of Egypt:—that all had gone wrong since the day he forsook his father's house.

——Leave the story;—it will be told more concisely.—'When he was yet far off, his father saw 'him;'—Compassion told it in three words.—'he fell 'upon his neck, and kissed him.'

Great is the power of eloquence; but never is it so great as when it pleads along with Nature, and the culprit is a child strayed from his duty, and returned to it again with tears. Casuists may settle the point as they will; but what could a parent see more in the account than the natural one, of an ingenuous heart too open for the world,—smitten with strong unsensations of pleasures, and suffered to sally forth armed into the midst of enemies stronger than himself?

Generosity sorrows as much for the overmatched, as Pity herself does.

* *Vide* 2 Chron. ix. 21.

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The idea of a son so ruined, would double the father's caresses: every effusion of his tenderness would add bitterness to his son's remorse,—'Gracious 'Heaven! what a father have I rendered miserable!'

'And he said, I have sinned against Heaven, and 'in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called 'thy son.'

'But the father said, Bring forth the best robe.'

O ye affections! how fondly do you play at cross purposes with each other!—'Tis the natural dialogue of true transport: joy is not methodical: and where an offender, beloved, overcharges itself in the offence, —words are too cold; and a conciliated heart replies by tokens of esteem.

'And he said unto his servants, Bring forth the best 'robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his 'hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the 'fatted calf, and let us eat and drink, and be merry.'

When the affections so kindly break loose, Joy is another name for Religion.

We look up as we taste it: the cold Stoic without, when he hears the dancing and music, may ask sullenly (with the elder brother) What it means, and refuse to enter: but the humane and compassionate all fly impetuously to the banquet given for 'a son 'who was dead, and is alive again;—who was lost, 'and is found.' Gentle spirits, light up the pavilion with a sacred fire; and parental love and filial piety, lead in the mask with riot and wild festivity!—Was it not for this that God gave man music to strike upon the kindly passions; that Nature taught the feet to dance to its movements, and, as chief governess of the feast, poured forth wine into the goblet to crown it with gladness?

The intention of this parable is so clear from the

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occasion of it, that it will not be necessary to perplex it with any tedious explanation: it was designed by way of indirect remonstrance to the Scribes and Pharisees, who animadverted upon our Saviour's conduct, for entering so freely into conferences with sinners in order to reclaim them. To that end, he proposes the parable of the shepherd, who left his ninety-and-nine sheep that were safe in the fold, to go and seek for one sheep that was gone astray,—telling them, in other places, that they who were whole wanted not a physician,—but they that were sick: and here, to carry on the same lesson, and to prove how acceptable such a recovery was to God, he relates this account of the prodigal son and his welcome reception.

I know not whether it would be a subject of much edification to convince you here, that our Saviour, by the prodigal son, particularly pointed at those who are *sinners of the Gentiles*, and were recovered by divine grace to repentance;—and that, by the elder brother, he intended as manifestly the more froward of the Jews, who envied their conversion, and thought it a kind of wrong to their primogeniture, in being made fellow-heirs with them of the promises of God.

These uses have been so ably set forth, in so many good sermons upon the Prodigal Son, that I shall turn aside from them at present, and content myself with some reflections upon that fatal passion which led him,—and so many thousands after the example, 'to 'gather all he had together, and take his journey into a 'far country.'

The love of variety, or curiosity of seeing new things, which is the same, or at least a sister passion to it,—seems wove into the frame of every son and daughter of Adam; we usually speak of it as one of Nature's levities, though planted within us for the

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solid purposes of carrying forward the mind to fresh inquiry and knowledge. Strip us of it, the mind (I fear) would doze for ever over the present page, and we should all of us rest at ease with such objects as presented themselves in the parish or province where we first drew breath.

It is to this spur, which is ever in our sides, that we owe the impatience of this desire for travelling: the passion is no way bad,—but, as others are,—in its mismanagement or excess;—order it rightly, the advantages are worth the pursuit;—the chief of which are,—to learn the languages, the laws and customs, and understand the government and interest of other nations;—to acquire an urbanity and confidence of behaviour, and fit the mind more easily for conversation and discourse;—to take us out of the company of our aunts and grandmothers, and from the track of nursery mistakes; and by shewing us new objects, or old ones in new lights, to reform our judgments:—by tasting perpetually the varieties of Nature, to know what *is good;*—and by observing the address and arts of man, to conceive what *is sincere;*—and, by seeing the difference of so many various humours and manners,—to look into ourselves, and form our own.

This is some part of the cargo we might return with; but the impulse of seeing new sights, augmented with that of getting clear from all lessons both of wisdom and reproof at home,—carries our youth too early out, to turn this venture to much account; on the contrary, if the scene painted of the prodigal in his travels looks more like a copy than an original—will it not be well if such an adventurer, with so unpromising a setting out,—without *carte*,—without compass,—be not cast away for ever;—and may he not be said to escape well,—if he return to his country only as naked as he first left it?

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But you will send an able pilot with your son—a scholar.

If wisdom can speak in no other language but Greek or Latin,—you do well;—or, if mathematics will make a man a gentleman,—or natural philosophy but teach him to make a bow,—he may be of some service in introducing your son into good societies, and supporting him in them when he has done so; but the upshot will be generally this, that, in the most pressing occasions of address,—if he is a mere man of reading, the unhappy youth will have the tutor to carry,—and not the tutor to carry him.

But you will avoid this extreme; he shall be escorted by one who knows the world, not merely from books,—but from his own experience;—a man who has been employed in such services, and thrice made *the tour of Europe with success;*—

——That is, without breaking his own or his pupil's neck;—for if he is such as my eyes have seen! some broken *Swiss valet de chambre*,—some general undertaker, who will perform the journey in so many months, *if God permit*,—much knowledge will not accrue;—some profit at least; he will learn the amount, to a halfpenny, of every stage from Calais to Rome;—he will be carried to the best inns,—instructed where there is the best wine, and sup a livre cheaper than if the youth had been left to make the tour and the bargain himself.—Look at our governor, I beseech you,—see, he is an inch taller as he relates the advantages!

——And here endeth his pride, his knowledge, and his use.

But, when your son gets abroad, he will be taken out of his hand, by his society with men of rank and letters, with whom he will pass the greatest part of his time.

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Let me observe, in the first place,—that company which is really good is very rare, and very shy; but you have surmounted this difficulty and procured him the best letters of recommendation to the most eminent and respectable in every capital.

And I answer, that he will obtain all by them which courtesy strictly stands obliged to pay on such occasions, but no more.

There is nothing in which we are so much deceived as in the advantages proposed from our connexions and discourse with the *literati*, &c., in foreign parts; especially if the experiment is made before we are matured by years or study.

Conversation is a traffic; and if you enter into it without some stock of knowledge to balance the account perpetually betwixt you,—the trade drops at once:—and this is the reason,—however it may be boasted to the contrary,—why travellers have so little (especially good) conversation with natives,—owing to their suspicion,—or, perhaps, conviction, that there is nothing to be extracted from the conversation of young itinerants worth the trouble of their bad language,—or the interruption of their visits.

The pain on these occasions is usually reciprocal; the consequence of which is, that the disappointed youth seeks an easier society; and as bad company is always ready, and ever lying in wait,—the career is soon finished; and the poor prodigal returns the same object of pity with the prodigal in the Gospel.

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SERMON XXI.

NATIONAL MERCIES CONSIDERED.*

DEUTERONOMY, vi. 20, 21.

And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

THESE are the words which Moses left as a standing answer for the children of Israel to give their posterity, who in time to come might become ignorant or unmindful of the many and great mercies which God had vouchsafed to their forefathers; all which had terminated in that one of their deliverance out of bondage.

Though they were directed to speak in this manner, each man to his son, yet one cannot suppose that the direction should be necessary for the next generation,—for the children of those who had been eye-witnesses of God's providence: it does not seem likely that any of them should rise to that age of reasoning which would put them upon asking the supposed question, and not be long beforehand instructed in the answer. Every parent would tell his child the hardships of his captivity, and the amaz-

* On the Inauguration of George III.

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ing particulars of his deliverance: the story was so uncommon,—so full of wonder,—and withal, the recital of it would ever be a matter of such transport, it could not possibly be kept a secret:—the piety and gratitude of one generation would anticipate the curiosity of another: their sons would learn the story with their language.

This probably might be the case with the first or second race of people; but in process of time, things might take a different turn: a long and undisturbed possession of their liberties might blunt the sense of those providences of God which had procured them, and set the remembrance of all his mercies at too great a distance from their hearts. After they had for some years been eased of every real burden, an excess of freedom might make them restless under every imaginary one, and, amongst others, that of their religion; from whence they might seek occasion to enquire into the foundation and fitness of its ceremonies, its statutes, and its judgments.

They might ask, What meant so many commands, in matters which to them appeared indifferent in their own natures? What policy in ordaining them? and, What obligation could there lie upon reasonable creatures to comply with a multitude of such unaccountable injunctions, so unworthy the wisdom of God?

Hereafter, possibly, they might go further lengths; and though their natural bent was generally towards superstition, yet some adventurers, as is ever the case, might steer for the opposite coast, and as they advanced, might discover that all religions, of whatever denominations or complexions soever, were alike; —that the religion of their own country, in particular, was a contrivance of the priests and Levites,—a phan-

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tom dressed out in a terrifying garb of their own making, to keep weak minds in fear!—that its rites and ceremonies, and numberless injunctions, were so many different wheels in the same political engine, put in, no doubt, to amuse the ignorant, and keep them in such a state of darkness as clerical juggling requires.

That as for the moral part of it, though it was unexceptionable in itself,—yet it was a piece of intelligence they did not stand in want of: men had natural reason always to have found it out,—and wisdom to have practised it without Moses' assistance.

Nay, possibly, in process of time they might arrive at greater improvements in religious controversy:—when they had given their system of infidelity all the strength it could admit of from reason, they might begin to embellish it with some more sprightly conceits and turns of ridicule.

Some wanton Israelite, when he had eaten and was full, might give free scope and indulgence to this talent. As arguments and sober reasoning fail'd, he might turn the edge of his wit against types and symbols, and treat all the mysteries of his religion, and every thing that could be said on so serious a subject, with raillery and mirth: he might give vent to a world of pleasantry upon many sacred passages of his law: he might banter the golden calf, or the brazen serpent, with great courage,—and confound himself in the distinctions of clean and unclean beasts, by the desperate sallies of his wit against them.

He could but possibly take one step farther; when the land which flowed with milk and honey had quite worn out the impressions of his yoke, and blessings began to multiply upon his hands, he might

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draw this curious conclusion;—That there was no Being who was the author and bestower of them,—but that it was their own arm and the mightiness of Israelitish strength, which had put them, and kept them, in possession of so much happiness.

O Moses,—how would thy meek and patient spirit have been put to the torture by such a return! If a propensity towards superstition in the Israelites did once betray thee into such an excess of anger, that thou threwest the two tables out of thy hands, which God had wrote, and carelessly hazardest the whole treasure of the world,—with what indignation and honest anguish wouldst thou have heard the scoffings of those who denied the hand which brought them forth, and said,—Who is God, that we should obey his voice?—with what force and vivacity wouldst thou have reproached them with the history of their own nation!—that if too free an enjoyment of God's blessings had made them forget to look backwards,—it was necessary to remind them that their forefathers were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, without prospect of deliverance: that the chains of their captivity had been fixed and rivetted by a succession of four hundred and thirty years, without the interruption of one struggle for their liberty: that after the expiration of that hopeless period, when no natural means favoured the event, they were snatched, almost against their own wills, out of the hands of their oppressors, and led through an ocean of dangers, to the possession of a land of plenty: that this change in their affairs was not the produce of chance or fortune, nor was it projected or executed by any achievement or plan of human device, which might soon again be defeated by superior strength or policy from without, or from force of accidents from within;

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from change of circumstances, humours, and passions of men, all which generally had a sway in the rise and fall of kingdoms; — but that all was brought about by the power and goodness of God, who saw and pitied the afflictions of a distressed people, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, set them free from the yoke of oppression.

That since that miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for by second causes and the natural course of events, had demonstrated not only God's providence in general, but his particular providence and attachment to them; — that nations greater and mightier than they were driven out before them, and their lands given to them for an everlasting possession.—

This was what they should teach their children, and their children's children after them. — Happy generations, for whom so joyful a lesson was prepared! happy indeed, had ye at all times known to have made the use of it which Moses continually exhorted,—'of drawing nigh unto God with all your 'hearts, who had been so nigh unto you!'

And here let us drop the argument as it respects the Jews, and for a moment turn it towards ourselves: — the present occasion, and the recollection which is natural upon it, of the many other parts of this complicated blessing vouchsafed to us since we became a nation, making it hard to desist from such an application.

I begin with the first in order of time, as well as the greatest of national deliverances,—our deliverance from darkness and idolatry, by the conveyance of the light which Christianity brought with it into Britain, so early as in the life-time of the Apostles themselves, or, at furthest, not many years after their death.

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Though this might seem a blessing conveyed and offered to us in common with other parts of the world, yet, when you reflect upon this as a remote corner of the earth in respect to Judea,—its situation and inaccessibleness as an island, — the little that was then known of navigation,—or carried on of commerce, — the large tract of land which to this day remains unhallowed with the name of Christ, and almost in the neighbourhood of where the first glad tidings of him were sounded, — one cannot but adore the goodness of God, and remark a more particular providence in its conveyance and establishment here, than amongst other nations upon the Continent,—where, though the oppositions from error and prejudice were equal, it had not these natural impediments to encounter.

Historians and statesmen, who generally search everywhere for the causes of events but in the pleasure of Him who disposes of them, may make different reflections upon this. They may consider it as a matter incidental, brought to pass by the fortuitous ambition, success, and settlement of the Romans here; it appearing that in Claudius's reign, when Christianity began to get footing in Rome, near eighty thousand of that city and people were fixed in this island: as this made a free communication betwixt the two places, the way for the Gospel was in course open, and its transition from the one to the other natural and easy to be accounted for,—and yet, nevertheless, providential. God often suffers us to pursue the devices of our hearts, whilst he turns the course of them, like the rivers of waters, to bountiful purposes. Thus, he might make that pursuit of glory inherent in the Romans, the engine to advance his own, and establish it here: he might make the wickedness of the earth to work his

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own righteousness, by suffering them to wander a while beyond their proper bounds, till his purposes were fulfilled, and then put his 'hook into their 'nostrils,' and lead these wild beasts of prey back again into their own land.

Next to this blessing of the light of the Gospel, we must not forget that by which it was preserved from the danger of being totally smothered and extinguished, by that vast swarm of barbarous nations which came down upon us from the north, and shook the whole world like a tempest; changing names and customs, and language and government, and almost the very face of nature, wherever they fixed. That our religion should be preserved at all, when every thing else seemed to perish which was capable of change;—or, that it should not be hurt under that mighty weight of ruins, beyond the recovery of its former beauty and strength,—the whole can be ascribed to no cause so likely as this, That the same power of God which sent it forth, was present to support it,—when the whole frame of other things gave way.

Next in degree to this mercy of preserving Christianity from an utter extinction,—we must reckon that of being enabled to preserve and free it from corruptions, which the rust of time,—the abuses of men, and the natural tendency of all things to degeneracy which are trusted to them, had from time to time introduced into it.

Since the day in which this reformation was begun, by how many strange and critical turns has it been perfected and handed down,—if not 'entirely without 'spot or wrinkle,'—at least, without great blotches or marks of anility!—

Even the blow which was suffered to fall upon it shortly after, in that period where our history looks so

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unlike herself—(stain'd, Mary, by thee, and disfigured by blood)—can one reflect upon it, without adoring the providence of God, which so speedily snatched the sword of persecution out of her hand,—making her reign as short as it was merciless!

If God then made us, as he did the Israelites, suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock,—how much more signal was his mercy in giving them to us without money, without price, in those good days which followed, when a long and wise reign was as necessary to build up our church, as a short one was before, to save it from ruins!

——The blessing was necessary, and it was granted:—

God having multiplied the years of that renowned princess to an uncommon number, giving her time, as well as a heart, to fix a wavering persecuted people, and settle them upon such a foundation as must make them happy:—the touchstone by which *they* are to be tried whom God has entrusted with the care of kingdoms.

Blessed be thy glorious name for ever and ever, in making that test so much easier for the British, than other princes of this earth; whose subjects, whatever other changes they have felt, have seldom happened upon that of changing their misery; and, it is to be feared, are never likely, so long as they are kept so strongly bound in chains of darkness,—and chains of power.

From both these kinds of evils, which are almost naturally connected together, how providential was our escape in the succeeding reign, when all the choice blood was bespoke, and preparations made, to offer it up at one sacrifice!

I would not intermix the horrors of that black pro-

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jected festival with the glories of this; or name the sorrows of the next reign, which ended in the subversion of our constitution, was it not necessary to pursue the thread of our deliverances through those times, and remark how nigh God's providence was to us in them both,—by protecting us from the one in as signal a manner as he restored us from the other.

Indeed the latter of them might have been a joyless matter of remembrance to us at this day, had it not been confirmed a blessing by a succeeding escape, which sealed and conveyed it safe down to us: whether it was to correct an undue sense of former blessings,—or to teach us to reflect upon the number and value of them, by threatening us with the deprivation of them,—we were suffered, however, to approach the edge of a precipice, where, if God had not raised up a deliverer to lead us back,—all had been lost:—the arts of Jesuitry had decoyed us forwards; or, if that had failed, we had been push'd down by open force,—and our destruction had been inevitable.

The good consequences of that deliverance are such, that it seemed as if God had suffered our waters, like those of Bethesda, to be troubled, to make them afterwards more healing to us; since to the account of that day's blessing, we charge the enjoyment of every thing since worth a freeman's living for;—the revival of our liberty, our religion, the just rights of our kings,—and the just rights of our people; and along with all, that happy provision for their continuance, for which we are returning thanks to God this day.

Let us do it, I beseech you, in the way which becomes wise men, by pursuing the intentions of his blessings, and making a better use of them than our forefathers, who sometimes seem'd to grow weary of

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their own happiness:—let us rather thank God for the good land which he has given us; and when we begin to prosper in it, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein,—and when our silver and our gold is multiplied, and all that we have is multiplied, let the instances of our virtue and benevolence be multiplied with them, that the great and mighty God, who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, may, in the last day of accounting with us, judge us worthy of the mercies we have received.

In vain are days set apart to celebrate successful occurrences, unless they influence a nation's morals; —a sinful people can never be grateful to God,— nor can they, properly speaking, be loyal to their prince;—they cannot be grateful to the one, because they live not under a sense of his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, because they disengage the providence of God from taking his part, —and then giving a heart to his adversaries to be intractable.—

And therefore, what was said by some one, That every sin was a treason against the soul, may be applied here,—That every wicked man is a traitor to his king and country. And, whatever statesmen may write of the causes of the rise and fall of nations; —for the contrary reasons, a good man will ever be found to be the best patriot and the best subject: and though an individual may say, What can my righteousness profit a nation of men? it may be answered, That if it should fail of a blessing here,—it will have one advantage at least, which is this,—

It will save thy own soul;—which may God grant! Amen.

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SERMON XXII.

THE HISTORY OF JACOB CONSIDERED.

GENESIS, xlvii. 9.

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.

THERE is not a man in history whom I pity more than the man who made this reply;—not because his days were short,—but that they were long enough to have crowded into them so much evil as we find.

Of all the patriarchs, he was the most unhappy: for, 'bating the seven years he served Laban for Rachel, 'which seemed to him but a few days, for 'the love he had to her,'—strike those out of the number,—all his other days were sorrow; and that not from his faults, but from the ambition, the violences, and evil passions of others. A large portion of what man is born to, comes, you'll say, from the same quarter:—'tis true; but still, in some men's lives, there seems a contexture of misery:—one evil so rises out of another, and the whole plan and execution of the piece has so very melancholy an air, that a good-natured man shall not be able to look upon it but with tears on his cheeks.

I pity this patriarch still the more, because, from his first setting out in life, he had been led into an expectation of such different scenes: he was told by

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Isaac, his father, that 'God should bless him with 'the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, 'and with plenty of corn and wine;—that people 'were to serve him, and nations to bow down to him; '—that he should be lord over his brethren;—that 'blessed was every one that blessed him, and cursed 'was every one who cursed him.'

The simplicity of youth takes promises of happiness in the fullest latitude;—and as these were moreover confirmed to him by the God of his fathers, on his way to Padan-aran,—it would leave no distrust of their accomplishment upon his mind;—every fair and flattering object before him, which wore the face of joy, he would regard as a portion of his blessing;—he would pursue it;—he would grasp a shadow.

This, by the way, makes it necessary to suppose, that the blessings which were conveyed, had a view to blessings not altogether such as a carnal mind would expect; but that they were in a great measure spiritual, and such as the prophetic soul of Isaac had principally before him, in the comprehensive idea of their future and happy establishment, when they were no longer to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth: for in fact, in the strict and literal sense of his father's grant,—Jacob enjoyed it not; and was so far from being a happy man, that in the most interesting passages of his life, he met with nothing but disappointments and grievous afflictions.

Let us accompany him from the first treacherous hour of a mother's ambition; in consequence of which, he is driven forth from his country and the protection of his house, to seek protection and establishment in the house of Laban his kinsman.

In what manner this answered his expectations, we find from his own pathetic remonstrance to

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Laban, when he had pursued him seven days journey, and overtook him on Mount Gilead.—I see him in the door of the tent, with the calm courage which Innocence gives the oppressed, thus remonstrating to his father-in-law upon the cruelty of his treatment:—

'These twenty years that I have been with thee, '—thy ewes have not cast their young; and the 'rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which 'was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I 'bare the loss of it;—what was stolen by day, or 'stolen by night, of my hands didst thou require 'it. Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed 'me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed 'from my eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy 'house:—I served thee fourteen years for thy two 'daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou 'hast changed my wages ten times.'

Scarce had he recovered from those evils, when the ill conduct and vices of his children wound his soul to death:—Reuben proves incestuous;—Judah adulterous;—his daughter Dinah is dishonoured;—Simeon and Levi dishonour themselves by treachery;—two of his grandchildren are stricken with sudden death;—Rachel, his beloved wife, perishes, and in circumstances which embitter'd his loss;—his son Joseph, a most promising youth, is torn from him by the envy of his brethren;—and, to close all, himself driven by famine, in his old age, to die amongst the Egyptians;—a people who held it an abomination to eat bread with him. Unhappy patriarch! Well might he say, 'That few and evil had 'been his days:' the answer, indeed, was extended beyond the monarch's inquiry, which was simply his age;—but how could he look back upon the

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days of his pilgrimage, without thinking of the sorrows which those days had brought along with them? all that was more in the answer than in the demand was the overflowings of a heart ready to bleed afresh at the recollections of what had befallen.

Unwillingly does the mind digest the evils prepared for it by others;—for those we prepare ourselves,—we eat but the fruit which we have planted and watered:—a shattered fortune,—a shattered frame, so we have but the satisfaction of shattering them ourselves, pass naturally enough into the habit; and by the ease with which they are both done, they save the spectator a world of pity:—but for those like Jacob's, brought upon him by the hands from which he looked for all his comforts,—the avarice of a parent,—the unkindness of a relation,—the ingratitude of a child,—they are evils which leave a scar;—besides, as they hang over the heads of all, and therefore may fall upon any—every looker-on has an interest in the tragedy;—but then we are apt to interest ourselves no otherwise than merely as the incidents themselves strike our passions, without carrying the lesson further.—In a word,—we realize nothing:—we sigh,—we wipe away the tear,—and there ends the story of Misery, and the moral with it.

Let us try to do better with this. To begin with the bad bias which gave the whole turn to the patriarch's life,—parental partiality,—or parental injustice,—it matters not by what title it stands distinguished,—'tis that by which Rebekah planted a dagger in Esau's breast,—and an eternal terror with it in her own, lest she should live to be deprived of them both in one day:—and trust me, dear Christians, wherever that equal balance of kindness

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and love, which children look up to you for as their natural right, is no longer maintained, there will daggers ever be planted; 'the son shall [*literally*] be set at variance against his father, and 'the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;—and a man's 'foes shall be they of his own household.'

It was an excellent ordinance, as well as of domestic policy as of equity, which Moses gave upon this head, in the 21st of Deuteronomy:—

'If a man have two wives, one beloved and one 'hated, and they have borne him children, both 'the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born 'son be hers that was hated, then it shall be, when 'he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, 'that he may not make the son of the beloved first-born, before the son of the hated which is indeed 'the first-born;—but he shall acknowledge the son 'of the hated for first-born, by giving him a double 'portion of all that he hath.' The evil was well fenced against;—for 'tis one of those which steals in upon the heart with the affections, and courts the parent under so sweet a form, that thousands have been betrayed by the very virtues which should have preserved them. Nature tells the parent, there can be no error on the side of affection;—but we forget, when Nature pleads for one, she pleads for every child alike;—and, why is not her voice to be heard? Solomon says, 'Oppression will make a wise 'man mad.'—What will it do then to a tender and ingenuous heart which feels itself neglected,—too full of reverence for the author of its wrongs to complain?—See, it sits down in silence, robb'd by discouragements of all its natural powers to please,—born to see others loaded with caresses;—in some

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uncheery corner it nourishes its discontent,—and with a weight upon its spirits, which its little stock of fortitude is not able to withstand.—it droops and pines away,—sad victim of Caprice!

We are unavoidably led here into a reflection upon Jacob's conduct in regard to his son Joseph, which no way corresponded with the lesson of wisdom which the miseries of his own family might have taught him:—surely his eyes had seen sorrow sufficient on that score to have taken warning! and yet we find, that he fell into the same snare of partiality to that child in his old age, which his mother Rebekah had shewn to him in hers;—'for Israel loved Joseph more than all his 'children, because he was the son of his old age; and 'he made him a coat of many colours.'——O Israel! where was that prophetic spirit which darted itself into future times, and told each tribe what was to be its fate?—where was it fled, that it could not aid thee to look so little a way forwards, as to behold 'this 'coat of many colours' stained with blood? Why were the tender emotions of a parent's anguish hid from thy eyes?—and, Why is every thing?—but that it pleases Heaven to give us no more light in our way than will leave virtue in possession of its recompense.

—Grant me, gracious God, to go cheerfully, on the road which thou hast marked out!—I wish it neither more wide nor more smooth:—continue the light of this dim taper thou hast put into my hands.—I will kneel upon the ground seven times a day, to seek the best track I can with it;—and having done that, I will trust myself and the issue of my journey to thee, who art the Fountain of joy,—and will sing songs of comfort as I go along!

Let us proceed to the second great occurrence in the patriarch's life,—The imposition of a wife upon

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him, which he neither bargain'd for nor loved.—'And 'it came to pass in the morning, behold it was Leah! 'and he said unto Laban, What is this that thou hast 'done unto me? Did I not serve thee for Rachel? 'Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?'

This, indeed, is out of the system of all conjugal impositions now,—but the moral of it is still good: and the abuse, with the same complaint as Jacob's upon it, will ever be repeated, so long as Art and Artifice are so busy as they are in these affairs.

Listen, I pray you, to the stories of the disappointed in marriage!—collect all their complaints:—hear their mutual reproaches; upon what fatal hinge do the greatest part of them turn?—They were mistaken in the person.—Some disguise, either of body or mind, is seen through in the first domestic scuffle;—some fair ornament,—perpaps the very one that won the heart, —'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,' falls off. —'It is not the Rachael for whom I have served;— 'Why hast thou then beguiled me?'

Be open,—be honest:—give yourself for what you are; conceal nothing,—varnish nothing:—and if these fair weapons will not do,—better not conquer at all than conquer for a day.—When the night is passed, 'twill ever be the same story:—'And it came to pass, 'behold it was Leah.'

If the heart beguiles itself in its choice, and imagination will give excellencies which are not the portion of flesh and blood,—when the dream is over, and we awake in the morning, it matters little whether 'tis Rachael or Leah;—be the object what it will, as it must be on the earthly side, at least, of perfection,—it will fall short of the work of fancy, whose existence is in the clouds.

In such cases of deception, let no man exclaim as

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Jacob does in his,—'What is it thou hast done unto 'me?'—for 'tis his own doings; and he has nothing to lay his fault on but the heat and poetic indiscretion of his own passions.

I know not whether 'tis of any use to take notice of this singularity in the patriarch's life, in regard to the wrong he received from Laban, which was the very wrong he had done before to his father Isaac, when the infirmities of old age had disabled him from distinguishing one child from another: 'Art thou my 'very son Esau? And he said, I am.' 'Tis doubtful whether Leah's veracity was put to the same test; but both suffered from a similitude of stratagem; and 'tis hard to say, whether the anguish, from cross'd love, in the breast of one brother, might not be as sore a punishment as the disquietudes of cross'd ambition and revenge in the breast of the other.

I do not see which way the honour of Providence is concerned in repaying us exactly in our own coin;—or, why a man should fall into that very pit (and no other) which he has 'graven and digged for another 'man.' Time and chance may bring such incidents about; and there wants nothing, but that Jacob should have been a bad man to have made this a common-place text for such a doctrine.

It is enough for us, that the best way to escape evil is, in general, not to commit it ourselves;—and that whenever the passions of mankind will order it otherwise, to rob those, at least, 'who love judgment,' of the triumph of finding it out,—'That our travail 'has returned upon our heads, and our violent dealings 'upon our own pates.'

I cannot conclude this discourse, without returning first to the part with which it set out;—the patriarch's account to the king of Egypt of the shortness and

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misery of his days.—Give me leave to bring this home to us, by a single reflection upon each.

There is something strange in it, that life should appear so short *in the gross*,—and yet so long *in the detail*. Misery may make it so, you'll say,—but we will exclude it;—and still you'll find, though we all complain of the shortness of life, what numbers there are who seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city, to compel guests to come in, and take it off their hands: to do this with ingenuity and forecast, is not one of the least arts and business of life itself; and they who cannot succeed in it, carry as many marks of distress about them as Bankruptcy herself could wear. Be as careless as we may, we shall not always have the power;—nor shall we always be in a temper to let the account run thus. When the blood is cool'd, and the spirits, which have hurried us on through half our days, before we have numbered one of them, are beginning to retire,—then Wisdom will press a moment to be heard;—afflictions, or a bed of sickness, will find their hours of persuasion;—and, should they fail, there is something yet behind:—Old Age will overtake us at last, and with its trembling hand hold up the glass to us as it did to the patriarch.

—Dear inconsiderate Christians, wait not, I beseech you, till then;—take a view of your life now:—look back, behold this fair space capable of such heavenly improvements,—all scrawl'd over and defaced with ——I want words to say with what,—for I think only of the reflections with which you are to support yourselves in the decline of a life so miserably cast away,—should it happen, as it often does, that ye have stood idle unto the eleventh hour, and have all the work of

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the day to perform when night comes on, and no one can work.

2ndly, As to the evil of the days of the years of our pilgrimage,—speculation and fact appear at variance again.—We agree with the patriarch, that the life of man is miserable; and yet the world looks happy enough, and every thing tolerably at its ease. It must be noted, indeed, that the patriarch, in this account, speaks merely his present feelings; and seems rather to be giving a history of his sufferings than a system of them, in contradiction to that of the God of Love. Look upon the world he has given us!—observe the riches and plenty which flow in every channel, not only to satisfy the desires of the temperate,—but of the fanciful and wanton!—every place is almost a paradise, planted when Nature was in her gayest humour!

—Every thing has two views. Jacob, and Job, and Solomon, gave one section of the globe;—and this representation another.—Truth lieth betwixt,—or rather, good and evil are mixed up together; which of the two preponderates, is beyond our enquiry;—but, I trust,—it is the good.—First, As it renders the Creator of the world more dear and venerable to us;—and, secondly, Because I will not suppose that a work intended to exalt his glory, should stand in want of apologies.

Whatever is the proportion of misery in this world, it is certain, that it can be no duty of religion to increase the complaint,—or to affect the praise which the Jesuits' college of Granada gave their Sanchez:—That though he lived where there was a very sweet garden, yet was never seen to touch a flower; and that he would rather die than eat salt or pepper, or aught that might give a relish to his meat.

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I pity the men, whose natural pleasures are burdens, and who fly from Joy (as these splenetic and morose souls do) as if it was really an evil in itself.

If there is an evil in this world, 'tis sorrow and heaviness of heart.—The loss of goods,—of health,—of coronets and mitres, are only evil as they occasion sorrow;—take that out,—the rest is fancy, and dwelleth only in the head of man.

Poor unfortunate creature that he is! as if the causes of anguish in the heart were not enow,—but he must fill up the measure with those of caprice; and not only walk in a vain shadow,—but disquiet himself in vain too!

We are a restless set of beings; and as we are likely to continue so to the end of the world,—the best thing we can do in it is, to make the same use of this part of our character which wise men do of other bad propensities;—when they find they cannot conquer them,—they endeavour, at least, to divert them into good channels.

If, therefore, we must be a solicitous race of self-tormentors,—let us drop the common objects which make us so,—and, for God's sake, be solicitous only to live well!

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SERMON XXIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS CONSIDERED.

LUKE, xvi. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.

THESE words are the conclusion of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the design of which was, to shew us the necessity of conducting ourselves by such lights as God had been pleased to give us; the sense and meaning of the patriarch's final determination in the text being this, That they who will not be persuaded to answer the great purposes of their being, upon such arguments as are offered to them in Scripture, will never be persuaded to it by any other means, how extraordinary soever;—'If they hear not Moses 'and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded 'though one should rise from the dead.'

——Rise from the dead! To what purpose? What could such a messenger propose or urge, which had not been proposed and urged already? The novelty or surprise of such a visit might awaken the attention of a curious unthinking people, who spent their time in nothing else but to hear and tell some new thing; but ere the wonder was well over, some new wonder would start up in its room, and then the man might return to

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the dead, from whence he came, and not a soul make one inquiry about him.

—This, I fear, would be the conclusion of the affair. But to bring this matter still closer to us, let us imagine, if there is nothing unworthy in it, that God, in compliance with a curious world,—or from a better motive,—in compassion to a sinful one, should vouchsafe to send one from the dead, to call home our conscience, and make us better Christians, better citizens, better men, and better servants to God than we are.

Now bear with me, I beseech you, in framing such an address as, I imagine, would be most likely to gain our attention, and conciliate the heart to what he had to say: the great channel to it is interest;—and there he would set out.

He might tell us (after the most indisputable credentials of whom he served) That he was come a messenger from the great God of Heaven, with reiterated proposals, whereby much was to be granted us on his side,—and something to be parted with on ours: but that, not to alarm us,—'twas neither houses, nor land, nor possessions:—'twas neither wives, nor children, nor brethren, nor sisters, which we had to forsake;—no one rational pleasure to be given up;—no natural endearment to be torn from.——

In a word, he would tell us, We had nothing to part with,—but what was not for our interests to keep,—and that was our vices; which brought death and misery to our doors.

He would go on, and prove it by a thousand arguments, that to be temperate and chaste, and just and peaceable, and charitable and kind to one another,—was only doing that for CHRIST'S sake, which was most for our own; and that, were we in a capacity of capitulating with God, upon what terms we would submit

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to his government;—he would convince us, 'twould be impossible for the wit of man to frame any proposals more for our present interests, than to 'lead an uncor-'rupted life,—to do the thing which is lawful and 'right,' and lay such restraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature and the refinement of human happiness.

When this point was made out, and the alarms from interest got over,—the spectre might address himself to the other passions.—In doing this, he could but give us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God;—nor could he do more than impress the most awful ones of his majesty and power:—he might remind us, that we are creatures but of a day, hastening to the place from whence we shall not return;—that during our stay we stood accountable to this Being, who, though rich in mercies, yet was terrible in his judgments;—that he took notice of all our actions,—that he was about our paths, and about our beds, and spied out all our ways; and was so pure in his nature, that he would punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart; and had appointed a day wherein he would enter into this enquiry.

He might add,——

But what?—with all the eloquence of an inspired tongue, What could he add or say to us, which has not been said before? The experiment has been tried a thousand times, upon the hopes and fears, the reasons and passions of men, by all the powers of nature; the applications of which have been so great,—and the variety of addresses so unanswerable, that there is not a greater paradox in the world than that so great a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.

The fact is, mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced;—and so long as the pre-engagement

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with our passion subsists, it is not argumentation which can do the business;—we may amuse ourselves with the ceremony of the operation, but we reason not with the proper faculty, when we see every thing in the shape and colouring in which the treachery of the senses paints it: and, indeed, were we only to look into the world, and observe how inclinable men are to defend evil, as well as to commit it,—one would think, at first sight, they believed that all discourses of religion and virtue were mere matters of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with; and conclude very naturally, that we seemed to be agreed in no one thing but speaking well and acting ill. But the truest comment is in the text:—'If they hear not 'Moses and the prophets,' &c.

If they are not brought over to the interest of religion upon such discoveries as God has made,—or has enabled them to make, they will stand out against all evidence;—in vain shall one rise for their conviction;—was the earth to give up her dead,—'twould be the same;—every man would return again to his course,—and the same bad passions would produce the same bad actions to the end of the world.

This is the principal lesson of the parable; but I must enlarge upon the whole of it—because it has some other useful lessons; and they will best present themselves to us as we go along.

In this parable, which is one of the most remarkable in the Gospel, our Saviour represents a scene, in which, by a kind of contrast, two of the most opposite conditions that could be brought together from human life are pass'd before our imaginations.

The one, a man exalted above the level of mankind, to the highest pinnacle of prosperity,—to riches,

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—to happiness;—I say *happiness*, in compliance with the world, and on a supposition that the possession of riches must make us happy, when the very pursuit of them so warms our imaginations, that we stake both body and soul upon the event; as if they were things not to be purchased at too dear a rate. They are the wages of wisdom,—as well as of folly.—Whatever was the case here is beyond the purport of the parable;—the Scripture is silent, and so should we; it marks only his outward condition by the common appendages of it, in the two great articles of Vanity and Appetite:—to gratify the one, he was clothed in purple and fine linen; to satisfy the other, fared sumptuously every day;—and upon every thing too, we'll suppose, that climates could furnish,—that luxury could invent,—or the hand of science could torture.

Close by his gates is represented an object, whom Providence might seem to have placed there to cure the pride of man, and shew him to what wretchedness his condition might be brought: a creature in all the shipwreck of nature;—helpless,—undone,—in want of friends,—in want of health,—and in want of every thing with them which his distresses called for.

In this state he is described as desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; and though the case is not expressly put, that he was refused, yet, as the contrary is not affirmed in the historical part of the parable,—or pleaded after by the other, that he shewed mercy to the miserable,—we may conclude his request was unsuccessful;—like too many others in the world, either so high lifted up in it, that they cannot look down distinctly enough upon the sufferings of their fellow-creatures,

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—or, by long surfeiting in a continual course of banqueting and good cheer, they forget that there is such a distemper as hunger in the catalogue of human infirmities.

Overcharged with this, and perhaps a thousand unpitied wants in a pilgrimage through an inhospitable world,—the poor man sinks silently under his burden.—But, good God! whence is this? Why dost thou suffer these hardships in a world which thou hast made? Is it for thy honour that one man should eat the bread of fulness, and so many of his own stock and lineage eat the bread of sorrow?—that this man should go clad in purple, and have all his paths strewed with rosebuds of delight, whilst so many mournful passengers go heavily along, and pass by his gates, hanging down their heads? Is it for thy glory, O God, that so large a shade of misery should be spread across thy works?—or, is it that we see but a part of them?—When the great chain is at length let down, and all that has held the two worlds in harmony is seen;—when the dawn of that day approaches, in which all the distressful incidents of this drama shall be unravelled!—when every man's case shall be reconsidered,—then wilt thou be fully justified in all thy ways, and every mouth shall be stopped.

After a long day of mercy mis-spent in riot and uncharitableness, the rich man died also:—the parable adds,—and was buried:—buried no doubt in triumph, with all the ill-timed pride of funerals, and empty decorations, which worldly folly is apt to prostitute upon those occasions.

But this was the last vain show; the utter conclusion of all his Epicurean grandeur:—the next is a scene of horror, where he is represented by our Saviour

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in a state of the utmost misery, from whence he is supposed to lift up his eyes towards Heaven, and cry to the patriarch Abraham for mercy.—'And Abraham 'said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time 'receivedst thy good things.'

——That he had received his good things,—'twas from Heaven,—and could be no reproach. With what severity soever the Scripture speaks against riches, it does not appear that the living or faring sumptuously every day was the crime objected to the rich man, or that it is a real part of a vicious character: the case might be then as now; his quality and station in the world might be supposed to be such, as not only to have justified his doing this, but, in general, to have required it, without any imputations of doing wrong;—for differences of stations there must be in the world,—which must be supported by such marks of distinction as custom imposes. The exceeding great plenty and magnificence in which Solomon is described to have lived, who had ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer and fatted fowl, with thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, for the daily provision of his table;—all this is not laid to him as a sin, but rather remarked as an instance of God's blessing to him; and whenever these things are otherwise, 'tis from a wasteful and dishonest perversion of them to pernicious ends,—and oft-times, to the very opposite ones to which they were granted,—to glad the heart, to open it, and render it more kind.—

And this seems to have been the snare the rich man had fallen into;—and possibly, had he fared less sumptuously,—he might have had more cool hours

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for reflection, and been better disposed to have conceived an idea of want, and to have felt compassion for it.

'And Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in 'thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise 'Lazarus evil things.' — Remember! sad subject of recollection! that a man has passed through this world with all the blessings and advantages of it on his side —favoured by God Almighty with riches,—befriended by his fellow-creatures in the means of acquiring them, —assisted every hour by the society of which he is a member, in the enjoyment of them,—to remember how much he has received,—how little he has bestowed!— that he has been no man's friend!—no one's protector! —no one's benefactor!——Blessed God!

Thus begging in vain for himself, he is represented at last as interceding for his brethren, that Lazarus might be sent to them to give them warning, and save them from the ruin which he had fallen into;—'They 'have Moses and the prophets,' was the answer of the patriarch;—'let them hear them:' but the unhappy man is represented as discontented with it, and still persisting in his request, and urging,—'Nay, father 'Abraham, but if one went from the dead, they would 'repent.'

—He thought so;—but Abraham knew otherwise; —and the grounds of the determination I have explained already;—so shall proceed to draw some other conclusions and lessons from the parable.

And first, our Saviour might further intend to discover to us by it, the dangers to which great riches naturally expose mankind; agreeably to what is elsewhere declared, how hardly shall they who have them enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

The truth is, they are often too dangerous a blessing

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for God to trust us with, or we to manage: they surround us at all times with ease, with nonsense, with flattery, and false friends, with which thousands and ten thousands have perished:—they are apt to multiply our faults, and treacherously to conceal them from us;—they hourly administer to our temptations; and neither allow us time to examine our faults, nor humility to repent of them.—Nay, what is strange, do they not often tempt men even to covetousness? and tho', amidst all the ill offices which riches do us, one would least suspect this vice, but rather think the one a cure for the other,—yet so it is, that many a man contracts his spirits upon the enlargement of his fortune, and is the more empty for being full.

But there is less need to preach against this. We seem all to be hastening to the opposite extreme of luxury and expense: we generally content ourselves with the solution of it; and say, 'Tis a natural consequence of trade and riches;—and there it ends.

By the way, I affirm there is a mistake in the account; and that it is not riches which are the cause of luxury,—but the corrupt calculation of the world, in making riches the balance for honour, for virtue, and for everything that is great and good; which goads so many thousands on with an affectation of possessing more than they have,—and, consequently, of engaging in a system of expenses they cannot support.

In one word, 'tis the necessity of *appearing* to be somebody, in order to be so,—which ruins the world.

This leads us to another lesson in the parable, concerning the true use and application of riches: we may be sure, from the treatment of the rich man, that he did not employ those talents as God intended.

How God did intend them,—may as well be known

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from an appeal to our own hearts, and the inscription you shall read there,—as from any chapter and verse I might cite upon the subject. Let us then for a moment, my dear auditors, turn our eyes that way, and consider the traces which even the most insensible man may have proof of, from what we may perceive springing up within him from some casual act of generosity; and though this is a pleasure which properly belongs to the good, yet let him try the experiment; —let him comfort the captive, or cover the naked with a garment, and he will feel what is meant by that moral delight arising in the mind from the conscience of a humane action.

But to know it right, we must call upon the compassionate.—Cruelty gives evidence unwillingly, and feels the pleasure but imperfectly; for this, like all other pleasures, is of a relative nature, and consequently the enjoyment of it requires some qualification in the faculty, as much as the enjoyment of any other good does. There must be something antecedent in the disposition and temper which will render that good, a good to that individual,—otherwise, though 'tis true it may be possessed,—yet it never can be enjoyed.

Consider how difficult you would find it, to convince a miserable heart that anything is good which is not profitable! or a libertine one, that anything is bad which is pleasant!

Preach to a voluptuary, who has modell'd both mind and body to no other happiness but good eating and drinking,—bid him 'taste and see how good God is,' —there is not an invitation in all nature would confound him like it.

In a word, a man's mind must be like your proposition, before it can be relished;—and 'tis the resem-

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blance between them which brings over his judgment, and makes him an evidence on your side.

'Tis therefore not to the cruel,—'tis to the merciful, —to those who rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep,—that we make this appeal. —'Tis to the generous, the kind, the humane, that I am now to tell the sad * story of the fatherless, and of him who hath no helper, and bespeak your alms-giving in behalf of those who know not how to ask it for themselves.

—What can I say more?—It is a subject on which I cannot inform your judgment;—and, in such an audience, I would not presume to practise upon your passions:—let it suffice to say, That they whom God hath blessed with the means,—and for whom he has done more, in blessing them likewise with a disposition,—have abundant reason to be thankful to Him, as the Author of every good gift, for the measure He hath bestowed on them both. 'Tis the refuge against the stormy wind and tempest, which He has planted in our hearts; and the constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, forces all the sons and daughters of Adam to seek shelter under it by turns. Guard it by entails and settlements as we will, the most affluent plenty may be stripp'd, and find all its worldly comforts, like so many withered leaves, dropping from us! —The crowns of princes may be shaken; and the greatest that ever awed the world have looked back and moralized upon the turn of the wheel!

That which has happened to one, may happen to every man: and therefore that excellent rule of our Saviour, in acts of benevolence, as well as every thing else, should govern us;—'That whatsoever ye

* Charity Sermon at St. Andrew's, Holborn.

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'would that men should do to you, do ye also unto 'them.'

Hast thou ever lain upon the bed of languishing? or laboured under a distemper which threatened thy life?—Call to mind thy sorrowful and pensive spirit at that time, and say, What it was that made the thoughts of death so bitter.—If thou hadst children, I affirm it, the bitterness of death lay there.—If unbrought up, and unprovided for,—What will become of them? Where will they find a friend when I am gone? Who will stand up for them, and plead their cause against the wicked?

—Blessed God!—to Thee, who art a Father to the fatherless, and a Husband to the widow,—I entrust them!

Hast thou ever sustained any considerable shock in thy fortune? or, Has the scantiness of thy condition hurried thee into great straits, and brought thee almost to distraction? Consider, who was it that spread a table in that wilderness of thought?—who made thy cup to overflow?—Was it not a friend of consolation who stepped in,—saw thee embarrassed with the tender pledges of thy love, and the partner of thy cares,—took them under his protection,—(Heaven! thou wilt reward him for it!)—and freed thee from all the terrifying apprehensions of a parent's love?

—Hast thou——

—But how shall I ask a question which must bring tears into so many eyes?—Hast thou ever been wounded in a more affecting manner still, by the loss of a most obliging friend?—or been torn away from the embraces of a dear and promising child by the stroke of death?—Bitter remembrance!—Nature droops at it;—but Nature is the same in all conditions and lots of life.—A child thrust forth in an

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evil hour, without food, without raiment, bereft of instruction, and the means of its salvation, is the subject of more tender heart-aches, and will awaken every power of Nature!—As we have felt for ourselves,—let us feel for Christ's sake,—let us feel for theirs; and may the God of all comfort bless you! Amen.

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SERMON XXIV.

PRIDE.

LUKE, xiv. 10, 11.

But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.—For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

It is an exhortation of our Saviour's to Humility, addressed by way of inference from what he had said in the three foregoing verses of the chapter; where, upon entering into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread, and marking how small a portion of this necessary virtue entered in with the several guests, discovering itself from their choosing the chief rooms and most distinguished places of honour,—he takes the occasion which such a behaviour offered, to caution them against Pride;—states the inconvenience of the passion,—shews the disappointments which attend it,—the disgrace in which it generally ends; in being forced at last to recede from the pretensions to what is more than our due; which, by the way, is the very thing the passion is eternally prompting us to expect. When, therefore, thou art bidden to a wedding, says our Saviour, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade

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thee and him, come and say to thee,—Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

—But thou, when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room.—Hard lecture!—In the lowest room?—What,—do I owe nothing to myself? Must I forget my station, my character in life?—resign the precedence which my birth, my fortune, my talents, have already placed me in possession of?—give all up! and suffer inferiors to take my honours?—Yes; —for that, says our Saviour, is the road to it: 'For 'when he that bade thee cometh, he will say to thee, 'Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship 'in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee:— 'for whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'

To make good the truth of which declaration, it is not necessary we should look beyond this life, and say, That in that day of retribution, wherein every high thing shall be brought low, and every irregular passion dealt with as it deserves,—that pride, amongst the rest (considered as a vicious character), shall meet with its proper punishment, of being abased, and lying down for ever in shame and dishonour.—It is not necessary we should look so far forwards for the accomplishment of this: the words seem not so much to imply the threat of a distant punishment, the execution of which was to be respited to that day,—as the declaration of a plain truth depending upon the natural course of things, and evidently verified in every hour's commerce with the world; from whence, as well as from our reasoning upon the point, it is found, That Pride lays us open to so many mortifying encounters, which Humility in its own nature rests secure from,—that, verily, each of them, in this world, have their reward

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faithfully dealt out by the natural workings of men's passions;—which, though very bad executioners in general, yet are so far just ones in this, that they seldom suffer the exultations of an insolent temper to escape the abasement, or the deportment of a humble one to fail of the honour, which each of their characters do deserve.

In other vicious excesses which a man commits, the world (though it is not much to its credit) seems to stand pretty neuter. If you are extravagant or intemperate, you are looked upon as the greatest enemy to yourself;—or if an enemy to the public, at least you are so remote a one to each individual, that no one feels himself immediately concerned in your punishment. But in the instances of Pride, the attack is personal: for, as this passion can only take its rise from a secret comparison which the party has been making of himself to my disadvantage, every intimation he gives me of what he thinks of the matter, is so far a direct injury, either as it withholds the respect which is my due,—or perhaps denies me to have any; or else, which presses equally hard, as it puts me in mind of the defects which I really have, and of which I am truly conscious, and consequently think myself the less deserving of an admonition: in every one of which cases, the proud man, in whatever language he speaks it,—if it is expressive of this superiority over me, either in the gifts of fortune, the advantages of birth or improvements, as it has proceeded from a mean estimation, and possibly a very unfair one, of the like pretensions in myself,—the attack, I say, is personal; and has generally the fate to be felt and resented as such.

So that, with regard to the present inconveniences,

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there is scarce any vice, bating such as are immediately punished by laws, which a man may not indulge with more safety to himself than this one of Pride;—the humblest of men not being so entirely void of the passion themselves, but that they suffer so much from the overflowings of it in others, as to make the literal accomplishment of the text a common interest and concern: in which they are generally successful,—the nature of the vice being such, as not only to tempt you to it, but to afford the occasions itself of its own humiliation.

The proud man,—see!—he is sore all over: touch him—you put him to pain: and though, of all others, he acts as if every mortal was void of all sense and feeling, yet is possessed with so nice and exquisite a one himself, that the slights, the little neglects and instances of disesteem, which would be scarce felt by another man, are perpetually wounding him, and oft-times piercing him to his very heart.

I would not, therefore, be a proud man, was it only for this, that it should not be in the power of every one who thought fit—to chastise me:—my other infirmities, however unworthy of me, at least will not incommode me;—so little discountenance do I see given to them, that it is not the world's fault, if I suffer by them:—but here, if I exalt myself, I have no prospect of escaping;—with this vice I stand swoln up in every body's way, and must unavoidably be thrust back: whichever way I turn, whatever step I take under the direction of this passion, I press unkindly upon some one, and, in return, must prepare myself for such mortifying repulses as will bring me down, and make me go on my way sorrowing.

This is from the nature of things, and the experience of life as far back as Solomon, whose observation

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upon it was the same,—and it will ever hold good, 'That before honour was humility, and a haughty 'spirit before a fall.—Put not therefore thyself forth 'in the presence of the king, and stand not in the 'place of great men:—for better is it—(which by 'the way is the very dissuasive in the text)—better 'is it, that it be said unto thee, Friend, come up 'higher, than thou shouldest be put lower in the 'presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.'

Thus much for the illustration of this one argument of our Saviour's against Pride.—There are many other considerations which expose the weakness of it, which His knowledge of the heart of man might have suggested: but, as the particular occasion which gave rise to this lecture of our Saviour's against Pride naturally led him to speak of the mortifications which attend such instances of it as he then beheld,—for this reason, the other arguments might be omitted, which perhaps in a set discourse would be doing injustice to the subject. I shall therefore, in the remaining part of this, beg leave to offer some other considerations, of a moral as well as a religious nature, upon this subject, as so many inducements to check this weak passion in man; which, though one of the most inconvenient of his infirmities,—the most painful and discourteous to society,—yet, by a sad fatality, so it is, that there are few vices, except such whose temptations are immediately seated in our natures, to which there is so general a propensity throughout the whole race.

This has led some satirical pens to write, That all mankind, at the bottom, were proud alike;—that one man differed from another, not so much in the different portions which he possessed of it, as in the different art and address by which he excels in the

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management and disguise of it to the world.—We trample, no doubt, too often upon the pride of Plato's mantle, with as great a pride of our own: yet, on the whole, the remark has more spleen than truth in it; there being thousands (if any evidence is to be allowed) of the most unaffected humility, and truest poverty of spirit, which actions can give proof of. Notwithstanding this, so much may be allowed to the observation, That Pride is a vice which grows up in society so insensibly, — steals in unobserved upon the heart upon so many occasions, — forms itself upon such strange pretensions, and, when it has done, veils itself under such a variety of unsuspected appearances,—sometimes even under that of Humility itself;— in all which cases, Self-love, like a false friend, instead of checking, most treacherously feeds this humour, points out some excellence in every soul to make him vain, and think more highly of himself than he ought to think; — that, upon the whole, there is no one weakness into which the heart of man is more easily betrayed—or which requires greater helps of good sense and good principles to guard against.

And first, the root from which it springs is no inconsiderable discredit to the fruit.

If you look into the best moral writers, who have taken pains to search into the grounds of this passion,—they will tell you, that Pride is the vice of little and contracted souls; — that whatever affectation of greatness it generally wears and carries in the looks, there is always meanness in the heart of it. — A haughty and an abject temper, I believe, are much nearer a-kin than they will acknowledge: —like *poor* relations, they look a little shy at one another at first sight; but trace back their pedigree,

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they are but collateral branches from the same stem; and there is scarce any one who has not seen many instances of it, as one of our poets alludes to, in that admirable stroke he has given of this affinity, in his description of a 'Pride which licks the dust.'

As it has *meanness* at the bottom of it,—so it is justly charged with having *weakness* there too; of which it gives the strongest proof in regard to the chief end it has in view, and the absurd means it takes to bring it about.

Consider a moment;—What is it the proud man aims at?—why,—such a measure of respect and deference as is due to his superior merit, &c. &c.

Now, good sense and a knowledge of the world shew us, that how much soever of these are due to a man, allowing he has made a right calculation,—they are still dues of such a nature, that they are not to be insisted upon. Honour and Respect must be a 'free-will offering:' treat them otherwise, and claim them from the world as a tax,—they are sure to be withheld; the first discovery of such an expectation disappoints it, and prejudices your title to it for ever.

To this speculative argument of its weakness, it has generally the ill fate to add another of a more substantial nature, which is matter of fact; That to turn giddy upon every little exaltation, is experienced to be no less a mark of a *weak brain* in the figurative, than it is in the literal sense of the expression:—in sober truth, 'tis but a scurvy kind of a trick *(quoties voluit Fortuna jocari)*—when Fortune, in one of her merry moods, takes a poor devil with this passion in his head, and mounts him up all at once as high as she can get him;—for it is sure to make him play such fantastic tricks, as to become

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the very fool of the comedy; and was he not a general benefactor to the world in making it merry, I know not how spleen could be pacified during the representation.

A third argument against Pride is, the natural connection it has with vices of an unsocial aspect: the Scripture seldom introduces it alone: Anger, or Strife, or Revenge, or some inimical passion, is ever upon the stage with it;—the proofs and reasons of which I have not time to enlarge on, and therefore shall say no more upon this argument than this,—That was there no other,—yet the bad company this vice is generally found in, would be sufficient by itself to engage a man to avoid it.

Thus much for the moral considerations upon this subject; a great part of which, as they illustrate chiefly the inconveniencies of Pride in a social light, may seem to have a greater tendency to make men guard the appearances of it, than conquer the passion itself, and root it out of their nature: to do this effectually, we must add the best arguments of Religion; without which, the best moral discourse may prove little better than a cold political lecture, taught merely to govern the passion so as not to be injurious to a man's present interest or quiet; all of which a man may learn to practise well enough, and yet at the same time be a perfect stranger to the best part of humility, which implies not a concealment of Pride, but an absolute conquest over the first risings of it which are felt in the heart of man.

And, first, one of the most persuasive arguments which Religion offers to this end is, that which rises from the state and condition of ourselves, both as to our natural and moral imperfections. It is impossible

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to reflect a moment upon this hint, but with a heart full of the humble exclamation, 'O God! what is 'man!—even a thing of nought!'—a poor, infirm, miserable, short-lived creature, that passes away like a shadow, and is hastening off the stage where the theatrical titles and distinctions, and the whole mask of Pride, which he has worn for a day, will fall off, and leave him naked as a neglected slave! Send forth your imagination, I beseech you, to view the last scene of the greatest and proudest who ever awed and governed the world:—see the empty vapour disappearing! one of the arrows of mortality this moment sticks fast within him!—see!—it forces out his life, and freezes his blood and spirits!

—Approach his bed of state,—lift up the curtain,—regard a moment with silence——

—Are these cold hands and pale lips all that is left of him who was canoniz'd by his own pride, or made a god of by his flatterers?

O my soul! with what dreams hast thou been bewitched! how hast thou been deluded by the objects thou hast so eagerly grasped at!

If this reflection from the natural imperfection of man, which he cannot remedy, does nevertheless strike a damp upon human Pride, much more must the considerations do so which arise from the wilful deprivations of his nature.

Survey yourselves, my dear Christians, a few moments, in this light!—behold a disobedient, ungrateful, intractable, and disorderly set of creatures, going wrong seven times in a day,—acting sometimes every hour of it against your own convictions—your own interests, and the intentions of your God, who wills and proposes nothing but your happiness and prosperity!—

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what reason does this view furnish you for Pride? how many does it suggest to mortify and make you ashamed?—Well might the son of Sirach say, in that sarcastical remark upon it, 'That Pride was not made 'for man:'—for some purposes, and for some particular beings, the passions might have been shaped—but not for him;—fancy it where you will, 'tis no where so improper—'tis in no creature so unbecoming.—

—But why so cold an assent to so incontested a truth?—Perhaps thou hast reasons to be proud:—for Heaven's sake! let us then hear them.—Thou hast the advantages of birth and title to boast of,—or thou standest in the sunshine of court-favour,—or thou hast a large fortune—or great talents—or much learning,—or Nature has bestowed her graces upon thy person;—speak,—on which of these foundations hast thou raised this fanciful structure?—Let us examine them.

Thou art well born:—then trust me, 'twill pollute no one drop of thy blood to be humble: humility calls no man down from his rank,—divests not princes of their titles: it is in life what the *clear obscure* is in painting; it makes the hero step forth in the canvas, and detaches his figure from the group in which he would otherwise stand confounded for ever.

If thou art rich,—then show the greatness of thy fortune,—or, what is better, the greatness of thy soul, in the meekness of thy conversation; condescend to men of low estate,—support the distressed, and patronize the neglected.—Be great; but let it be in considering riches as they are; as 'talents 'committed to an earthen vessel:'—that thou art but the *receiver;*—and that to be obliged and to be vain too,—is but the old solecism of pride and beggary, which, though they often meet,—yet ever make but an absurd society.

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If thou art powerful in interest, and standest deified by a servile tribe of dependents, — why shouldst thou be proud—because they are hungry! —Scourge me such sycophants: they have turned the heads of thousands, as well as thine.—

—But 'tis thy own dexterity and strength which have gained thee this eminence:—allow it:—but art thou proud that thou standest in a place where thou art the mark of one man's envy, another man's malice, or a third man's revenge,—where good men may be ready to suspect thee, and whence bad men will be ready to pull thee down?—I would be proud of nothing that is uncertain. Haman was so, because he was admitted alone to queen Esther's banquet; and the distinction raised him,—but it was fifty cubits higher than he ever dreamt or thought of.

Let us pass on to the pretences of learning, &c., &c. If thou hast a little, thou wilt be proud of it in course: if thou hast much, and good sense along with it, there will be no reason to dispute against the passion: a beggarly parade of remnants is but a sorry object of pride at the best;—but more so when we cry out upon it, as the poor man did of his hatchet—'Alas, Master!—for it was 'borrowed.'*

It is treason to say the same of beauty,—whatever we do of the arts and ornaments with which pride is wont to set it off: the weakest minds are most caught with both; being ever glad to win attention and credit from small and slender accidents,—through disability of purchasing them by better means. In truth, beauty has so many charms, one knows not how to speak against it; and when it happens that

* 2 Kings, vi. 7.

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a graceful figure is the habitation of a virtuous soul, when the beauty of the face speaks out the modesty and humility of the mind, and the justness of the proportion raises our thoughts up to the art and wisdom of the great Creator, something may be allowed it,—and something to the embellishments which set it off;—and yet, when the whole apology is read,—it will be found at last, that beauty, like truth, never is so glorious as when it goes the plainest.

Simplicity is the great friend to nature; and if I would be proud of any thing in this silly world, it should be of this honest alliance.

Consider what has been said: and may the God of all mercies and kindness watch over your passions, and inspire you 'with all humbleness of mind, meek-'ness, patience, and long-suffering!'—Amen.

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SERMON XXV.

HUMILITY.

MATTHEW xi. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

THE great business of man is the regulation of his spirit; the possession of such a frame and temper of mind, as will lead us peaceably through this world, and, in the many weary stages of it, afford us what we shall be sure to stand in need of,—'Rest unto our souls.'——Rest unto our souls!—'tis all we want,—the end of our wishes and pursuits: give us a prospect of this, we take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth to have it in possession: we seek for it in titles, in riches, and pleasures,—climb up after it by ambition,—come down again and stoop for it by avarice,—try all extremes: still we are gone out of the way; nor is it till after many miserable experiments, that we are convinced at last we have been seeking everywhere for it but where there is a prospect of finding it; and that is, within ourselves, in a meek and lowly disposition of heart. This, and this only, will give us rest unto our souls:—rest, from those turbulent and haughty passions which disturb our quiet;—rest, from the provocations and disappointments of the world, and a train of untold evils too

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long to be recounted, against all which this frame and preparation of mind is the best protection.

I beg you will go along with me in this argument. Consider how great a share of the uneasinesses which take up and torment our thoughts, owe their rise to nothing else but the dispositions of mind which are opposite to this character.

With regard to the provocations and offences which are unavoidably happening to a man in his commerce with the world,—take it as a rule,—as a man's pride is,—so is always his displeasure;—as the opinion of himself rises,—so does the injury,—so does his resentment: 'tis this which gives edge and force to the instrument which has struck him, and excites that heat in the wound which renders it incurable.

See how different the case is with the humble man! one half of these painful conflicts he actually escapes; the other part falls lightly on him:—he provokes no man by contempt; thrusts himself forward as the mark of no man's envy: so that he cuts off the first fretful occasions of the greatest part of these evils: and for those in which the passions of others would involve him, like the shrub in the valley, gently gives way, and scarce feels the injury of those stormy encounters which rend the proud cedar, and tear it up by its roots.

If you consider it with regard to the many disappointments of this life, which arise from the hopes of bettering our condition, and advancing in the world,—the reasoning is the same.

What we expect—is ever in proportion to the estimate made of ourselves. When pride and self-love have brought us in their account of this matter, we find that we are worthy of all honours,—fit for all places and employments:—as our expectations

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rise and multiply, so must our disappointments with them; and there needs nothing more to lay the foundation of our unhappiness, and both to make and keep us miserable. And, in truth, there is nothing so common in life, as to see thousands, who you would say had all the reason in the world to be at rest, so torn up and disquieted with sorrows of this class, and so incessantly tortured with the disappointments which their pride and passions have created for them, that though they appear to have all the ingredients of happiness in their hands,—they can neither compound or use them.—How should they? the goad is ever in their sides, and so hurries them on from one expectation to another, as to leave them no rest, day or night.

Humility, therefore, recommends itself as a security against these heart-aches; which though ridiculous sometimes in the eye of the beholder, yet are serious enough to the man who suffers them, and I believe would make no inconsiderable account in a true catalogue of the disquietudes of mortal man:—against these, I say, Humility is the best defence.

He that is little in his own eyes, is little too in his desires, and consequently moderate in his pursuit of them: like another man, he may fail in his attempts, and lose the point he aimed at,—but that is all;—he loses not himself,—he loses not his happiness and peace of mind with it;—even the contentions of the humble man are mild and placid.—Blessed character! When such a one is thrust back, who does not pity him?—when he falls, who would not stretch out a hand to raise him up?

And here I cannot help stopping in the midst of this argument, to make a short observation, which is this. When we reflect upon the character of

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Humility,—we are apt to think it stands the most naked and defenceless of all virtues whatever,—the least able to support its claims against the insolent antagonist who seems ready to bear him down, and all opposition which such a temper can make.

Now, if we consider him as standing alone,—no doubt, in such a case, he will be overpowered and trampled upon by his opposer:—but if we consider the meek and lowly man as he is,—fenced and guarded by the love, the friendship, and wishes of all mankind;—that the other stands alone, hated, discountenanced, without one true friend or hearty well-wisher on his side;—when this is balanced, we shall have reason to change our opinion, and be convinced that the humble man, strengthened with such an alliance, is far from being so over-matched, as at first-sight he may appear;—nay, I believe one might venture to go further, and engage for it that in all such cases, where real fortitude and true personal courage were wanted, he is much more likely to give proof of it; and I would sooner look for it in such a temper than in that of his adversary. Pride may make a man violent,—but humility will make him firm;—and which of the two do you think most likely to come off with honour,—he who acts from the changeable impulse of heated blood, and follows the uncertain motions of his pride and fury,—or the man who stands cool and collected in himself; who governs his resentments, instead of being governed by them; and on every occasion acts upon the steady motives of principle and duty?

But this by the way;—though, in truth, it falls in with the main argument: for if the observation is just, and Humility has the advantages where we should least expect them, the argument rises higher in behalf

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of those which are more apparently on its side:—in all which, if the humble man finds what the proud man must never hope for in this world,—that is, 'rest to 'his soul,'—so does he likewise meet with it from the influence such a temper has upon his condition under the evils of his life, not as chargeable upon the vices of men, but as the portion of his inheritance, by the appointment of God. For if, as Job says, we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, surely it is he, who thinks the greatest of these troubles below his sins,—and the smallest favours above his merit,—that is likely to suffer the least from the one, and enjoy the most from the other: 'tis he who possesses the soul in meekness, and keeps it subjected to all the issues of fortune, that is the farthest out of their reach.—No;—he blames not the sun, though it does not ripen his vine,—nor blusters at the winds, though they bring him no profit.—If the fountain of the humble man rises not as high as he could wish,—he thinks, however, that it rises as high as it ought; and as the laws of Nature still do their duty, that he has no cause to complain against them.

If disappointed of riches,—he knows the providence of God is not his debtor; that though he has received less than others, yet as he thinks himself less than the least, he has reason to be thankful.

If the world goes untoward with the humble man in other respects,—he knows a truth which the proud man does never acknowledge, and that is, that the world was not made for him; and, therefore, how little share soever he has of its advantages, he sees an argument of content in reflecting how little it is that a compound of sin, of ignorance, and frailty, has grounds to expect.

A soul thus turned and resigned, is carried smoothly

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down the stream of providence;—no temptations in his passage disquiet him with desire,—no dangers alarm him with fear: though open to all the changes and chances of others,—yet, by seeing the justice of what happens,—and humbly giving way to the blow,—though he is smitten, he is not smitten like other men, or feels the smart which they do.

Thus much for the doctrine of Humility:—let us now look towards the example of it.

It is observed by some one, that as pride was the passion through which sin and misery entered into the world, and gave our enemy the triumph of ruining our nature, that therefore the Son of God, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, when he entered upon the work of our restoration, he began at the very point where he knew we had failed;—and this he did by endeavouring to bring the soul of man back to its original temper of Humility: so that his first public address from the Mount began with a declaration of blessedness to the poor in spirit,—and almost his last exhortation in the text, was to copy the fair original he had set them of this virtue, and 'to learn of Him 'to be meek and lowly in heart.'

It is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man;—and so persuasive and accommodated to all Christians, that as much pride as there is still in the world, it is not credible but that every believer must receive some tincture of the character or bias towards it, from the example of so great and yet so humble a Master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this one virtue; and in every instance of it, shewed that He came not to share the pride and glories of life, or swell the hopes of ambitious followers, but to cast a damp upon them for ever, by appearing himself rather as a servant than

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a master,—coming, as he continually declared, not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and, as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him,—to have no form of comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire him. The voluntary meanness of his birth,—the poverty of his life,—the low offices in which it was engaged, in preaching the Gospel to the poor,—the inconveniences which attended the execution of it, in having no where to lay his head,—all spoke the same language.—That the God of truth should submit to the suspicion of an imposture:—his humble deportment under that, and a thousand provocations of a thankless people, still raises this character higher:—and what exalts it to its highest pitch,—the tender and pathetic proof he gave of the same disposition at the conclusion and great catastrophe of his sufferings,—when a life full of so many instances of humility was crowned with the most endearing one of 'humbling himself even to the death 'of the cross;'—the death of a slave, a malefactor —dragged to Calvary, without opposition—insulted without complaint!

—Blessed Jesus! how can the man who calls upon thy name, but learn of thee to be meek and lowly in heart!—how can he but profit when such a lesson was seconded—by such an example!

If humility shines so bright in the character of Christ, so does it in that of his religion; the true spirit of which tends all the same way.—Christianity, when rightly explained and practised, is all meekness and candour, and love and courtesy: and there is no one passion our Saviour rebukes so often, or with so much sharpness, as that one, which is subversive of these kind effects,—and that is Pride; which, in proportion as it governs us, necessarily leads us on to a dis-

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courteous opinion and treatment of others.—I say *necessarily*,—because 'tis a natural consequence, and the progress from the one to the other is unavoidable.

This our Saviour often remarks in the character of the Pharisees:—they trusted in themselves,—'twas no wonder, then, they despised others.

This, I believe, might principally relate to spiritual pride, which, by the way, is the worst of all pride; and as it is a very bad species of a very bad passion, I cannot do better than conclude the discourse with some remarks upon it.

In most conceits of a religious superiority, there has usually gone hand in hand with it, another fancy,—which, I suppose, has fed it;—and that is, a persuasion of some more than ordinary aids and illuminations from above.—Let us examine this matter.

That the influence and assistance of God's spirit, in a way imperceptible to us, does enable us to render him an acceptable service, we learn from Scripture.—In what particular manner this is effected, so that the act shall still be imputed ours—the Scripture says not: we know only the account is so; but as for any sensible demonstration of its workings to be felt as such within us—the word of God is utterly silent; nor can that silence be supplied by any experience. ——We have none; unless you call the false pretences to it such,—suggested by an enthusiastic or distempered fancy. As expressly as we are told and pray for the inspiration of God's Spirit, there are no boundaries fixed, nor can any be ever marked, to distinguish them from the efforts and determinations of our own reason: and, as firmly as most Christians believe the effects of them upon their hearts, I may venture to affirm, that since the promises were made, there never was a Christian of a cool head and sound

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judgment, that, in any instance of a change of life, would presume to say which part of his reformation was owing to divine help,—or which to the operations of his own mind;—or who, upon looking back, would pretend to strike the line, and say, 'Here it was that 'my own reflections ended;—and at this point the 'suggestions of the Spirit of God began to take 'place.'

However backwards the world has been in former ages in the discovery of such points as God never meant us to know,—we have been more successful in our own days:—thousands can trace out now the impressions of this divine intercourse in themselves, from the first moment they received it, and with such distinct intelligence of its progress and workings, as to require no evidence of its truth.

It must be owned, that the present age has not altogether the honour of this discovery: there were too many grounds given to improve on in the religious cant of the last century;—when the *in-comings*, *in-dwellings*, and *out-lettings* of the Spirit were the subjects of so much edification; and when, as they do now, the most illiterate mechanics, who, as a witty divine said of them, were much fitter to *make* a pulpit than get into one, were yet able so to frame their nonsense to the nonsense of the times, as to beget an opinion in their followers, not only that they pray'd and preach'd by inspiration, but that the most common actions of their lives were set about in the Spirit of the Lord.

The tenets of the Quakers (a harmless quiet people) are collateral descendants from the same enthusiastic original; and their accounts and way of reasoning upon their inward light and spiritual worship, are much the same; which last they carry thus much

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further, as to believe the Holy Ghost comes down upon their assemblies, and *moves* them, without regard to condition or sex, to make intercessions with unutterable groans.

So that, in fact, the opinions of Methodists, upon which I was first entering, is but a republication, with some alterations, of the same extravagant conceits:—and as enthusiasm generally speaks the same language in all ages, 'tis but too sadly verified in this; for though we have not yet got to the old terms of the in-comings and in-dwellings of the Spirit,—yet we have arrived at the first feelings of its entrance, recorded with as particular an exactness as an act of filiation;—so that numbers will tell you the identical place,——the day of the month, and the hour of the night, when the Spirit came in upon them, and took possession of their hearts.

Now there is this inconvenience on our side, That there is no arguing with a phrensy of this kind: for unless a representation of the case be a confutation of its folly to them, they must for ever be led captive by a delusion, from which no reasoner can redeem them: for if you should inquire upon what evidence so strange a persuasion is grounded,—they will tell you, 'They feel it is so.'—If you reply, That this is no conviction to you, who do not feel it like them, and therefore would wish to be satisfied by what tokens they are able to distinguish such emotions from those of fancy and complexion,—they will answer, That the manner of it is incommunicable by human language, but 'tis a matter of fact,—they feel its operations as plain and distinct as the natural sensations of pleasure, or the pains of a disorder'd body.—And since I have mentioned a disorder'd body, I cannot help suggesting, that amongst the more serious and deluded of this sect,

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'tis much to be doubted whether a disorder'd body has not oft-times as great a share in letting in these conceits as a disorder'd mind.

When a poor disconsolated drooping creature is terrified from all enjoyment,—prays without ceasing till his imagination is heated, fasts and mortifies and mopes, till his body is in as bad a plight as his mind,—is it a wonder, that the mechanical disturbances and conflicts of an empty belly, interpreted by an empty head, should be mistook for workings of a different kind from what they are;—or that in such a situation, where the mind sits upon the watch for extraordinary occurrences, and the imagination is pre-engaged on its side, is it strange if every commotion should help to fix him in this malady, and make him a fitter subject for the treatment of a Physician than a Divine?

In many cases, they seem so much above the skill of either, that unless God in his mercy rebuke this lying spirit, and call it back,—it may go on, and persuade millions to their destruction.

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SERMON XXVI.

ADVANTAGES OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE WORLD.

ROMANS, i. 22.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

THERE is no one project to which the whole race of mankind is so universally a bubble, as to that of being thought wise: and the affectation of it is so visible, in men of all complexions, that you every day see some one or other so very solicitous to establish the character, as not to allow himself leisure to do the things which fairly win it;—expending more art and stratagem to appear so in the eyes of the world, than what would suffice to make him so in truth.

It is owing to the force of this desire, that you see, in general, there is no injury touches a man so sensibly, as an insult upon his parts and capacity. Tell a man of other defects; that he wants learning, industry, or application,—he will hear your reproof with patience.—Nay, you may go further: take him in a proper season, you may tax his morals,—you may tell him he is irregular in his conduct,—passionate or revengeful in his nature,—loose in his principles;—deliver it with the gentleness of a friend,—possibly, he'll not only bear with you,—but, if ingenuous, he will thank you for your lecture, and promise a reformation.—But hint,—hint but a defect in his intel-

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lectuals, — touch but that sore place, — from that moment you are look'd upon as an enemy sent to torment him before his time; and, in return, may reckon upon his resentment and ill-will for ever: so that, in general, you will find it safer to tell a man he is a knave, than a fool;—and stand a better chance of being forgiven, for proving he has been wanting in a point of common honesty, than a point of common sense.

Strange souls that we are! as if to live well was not the greatest argument of Wisdom;—and, as if what reflected upon our morals, did not most of all reflect upon our understandings.

This, however, is a reflection we make a shift to overlook, in the heat of this pursuit; and, though we all covet this great character of Wisdom, there is scarce any point wherein we betray more folly than in our judgments concerning it; rarely bringing this precious ore either to the test or the balance: and though 'tis of the last consequence not to be deceived in it—we generally take it upon trust,—seldom suspect the quality, but never the quantity of what has fallen to our lot. So that, however inconsistent a man shall be in his opinions of this, and what absurd measures soever he takes in consequence of it, in the conduct of his life,—he still speaks comfort to his soul: and, like Solomon, when he had least pretence for it,—in the midst of his nonsense will cry out and say,—'That all 'my wisdom remaineth with me.'

Where, then, is wisdom to be found? and where is the place of understanding?

The politicians of this world, 'professing themselves 'wise,'—admit of no other claims of wisdom but the knowledge of men and business—the understanding the interests of states—the intrigues of courts—the finding

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out the passions and weaknesses of foreign ministers—and turning them and all events to their country's glory and advantage.—

—Not so the little man of this world, who thinks the main point of wisdom is to take care of himself;—to be wise in his generation;—to make use of the opportunity whilst he has it, of raising a fortune, and heraldizing a name.—Far wide is the speculative and studious man (whose office is in the clouds) from such little ideas:—Wisdom dwells with him in finding out the secrets of nature;—sounding the depths of arts and sciences;—measuring the heavens; telling the number of the stars, and calling them all by their names:—so that when, in our busiest imaginations, we have built and unbuilt again 'God stories in the heavens,'—and fancy we have found out the point whereon to fix the foundations of the earth; and, in the language of the book of Job, 'have searched out the corner stone thereof,' we think our titles to wisdom built upon the same basis with those of our knowledge, and that they will continue for ever.

The mistake of these pretenders is shewn at large by the Apostles, in the chapter from which the text is taken,—'Professing themselves *wise:*'—in which expression (by the way) St. Paul is thought to allude to the vanity of the Greeks and Romans, who being great encouragers of arts and learning, which they had carried to extraordinary heights, considered all other nations as *Barbarians*, in respect of themselves; and amongst whom, particularly the Greeks, the men of study and inquiry had assumed to themselves, with great indecorum, the title of the Wise Men.

With what parade and ostentation soever this was made out, it had the fate to be attended with one of the most mortifying abatements which could happen to

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Wisdom; and that was an ignorance of those points which most concerned man to know.

This he shews from the general state of the Gentile world, in the great article of their misconceptions of the Deity;—and, as wrong notions produce wrong actions,—of the duties and services they owed to him, and in course of what they owed to one another.

For though, as he argues in the foregoing verses,—'The invisible things of him from the creation of the 'world might be clearly seen and understood, by the 'things that are made;'—that is,—Though God, by the clearest discovery of himself, had ever laid before mankind such evident proofs of his eternal Being, his infinite powers and perfections,—so that what is to be known of his invisible nature, might all along be traced by the marks of his goodness,—and the visible frame and order of the world;—yet so utterly were they without excuse,—that though they knew God, and saw his image and superscription in every part of his works,—'yet they glorified him not.'—So bad a use did they make of the powers given them for this great discovery, that instead of adoring the Being thus manifested to them, in purity and truth, they fell into the most gross and absurd delusions,—'changed the 'glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made 'like unto corruptible men——to birds,——to four-'footed beasts and creeping things;—— professing 'themselves to be wise, they became fools.'—All their specious wisdom was but a more glittering kind of ignorance, and ended in the most dishonourable of all mistakes,—in setting up fictitious gods, to receive the tribute of their adoration and thanks.

The fountain of religion being thus poisoned, no wonder the stream shewed its effects, which are charged upon them in the following words, where he de-

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scribes the heathen world 'as full of all unrighteous-'ness,' — fornication, — covetousness, — maliciousness, —full of murder, — envy, — debate, — malignity,— whisperers, — backbiters, — haters of God, — proud,— boasters,—inventors of evil things,—disobedient to parents,—without understanding, without natural affection,—implacable,—unmerciful!—God in heaven defend us from such a catalogue!

But these disorders, if fairly considered, you'll say, have in no ages arisen so much from want of light, as a want of disposition to follow the light which God has ever imparted;—that the law written in their hearts was clear, and express enough for any reasonable creatures, and would have directed them, had they not suffered their passions more forcibly to direct them otherwise: that if we are to judge from this effect, namely, the corruption of the world, the same prejudice will recur even against the Christian religion; since mankind have at least been as wicked in later days, as in the more remote and simple ages of the world; and that, if we may trust to the facts, there are no vices which the Apostle fixes upon the heathen world, before the preaching of the Gospel, which may not be paralleled by as black a catalogue of vices in the Christian world since.

This necessarily brings us to an inquiry, Whether Christianity has done the world any service?——and, How far the morals of it have been made better since this system has been embraced?

In litigating this, one might oppose facts to facts to the end of the world, without coming one jot nearer to the point. Let us see how far their mistakes concerning the Deity will throw light upon the subject.

That there was one supreme Being who made this

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world, and who ought to be worshipped by his creatures, is the foundation of all religion, and so obvious a truth in nature——that Reason, as the Apostle acknowledges, was always able to discover it: and yet it seems strange, that the same faculty which made the discovery should be so little able to keep true to its own judgment, and support it long against the prejudices of wrong heads, and the propensity of weak ones towards idolatry and a multiplicity of gods.

For want of something to have gone hand in hand with reason, and fixed the persuasion for ever upon their minds that there was in truth but one God, the Maker and Supporter of heaven and earth, infinite in wisdom and knowledge, and all perfection,—how soon was this simple idea lost, and mankind led to dispose of those attributes inherent in the Godhead, and divide and subdivide them again amongst deities which their own dreams had given substance to;—His eternal power and dominion parcell'd out to gods of the land,—to gods of the sea,—to gods of the infernal regions: whilst the great God of gods, and Lord of lords, who ruleth over all the kingdoms of the world,—who is so great that nought is able to controul or withstand His power, was supposed to rest contented with his allotment, and to want power to act within such parts of his empire as they dismembered and assigned to others.

If the number of their gods, and this partition of their power, would lessen the idea of their majesty, what must be the opinions of their origin—when, instead of that glorious description which Scripture gives of 'The Ancient of Days who inhabiteth 'eternity,'—they gravely assigned particular times and places for the births and education of their gods! so

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that there was scarce a hamlet or even a desert, in Greece or Italy, which was not rendered memorable by some favour or accident of this kind!

And what rendered such conceits the more gross and absurd,—they supposed not only that the gods they worshipped had a beginning, but that they were produced by fleshly parents; and accordingly, they attributed to them corporeal shapes and difference of sex: and indeed, in this they were a little consistent, for their deities seemed to partake so much of the frailties to which flesh and blood is subject, that their history and their pedigree were much of a piece, and might reasonably claim each other. For they imputed to them not only the human defects of ignorance, want, fear, and the like, but the most unmanly sensualities, and what would be a reproach to human nature,—such as cruelty, adulteries, rapes, incest: and even in the accounts which we have from the sublimest of their poets,—what are they but anecdotes of their squabbles amongst themselves,—their intrigues, their jealousies, their ungovernable transports of choler,—nay, even their thefts,—their drunkenness, and bloodshed!

Here let us stop a moment, and enquire, what was Reason doing all this time, to be so miserably insulted and abused? Where held she her empire, whilst her bulwarks were thus borne down, and her first principles of religion and truth lay buried under them? If she was able by herself to regain the power she had lost, and put a stop to this folly and confusion,—why did she not? if she was not able to resist this torrent alone,—the point is given up,—she wanted aid; and revelation has given it.

But though Reason, you'll say, could not overthrow these popular mistakes,—yet it saw the folly

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of them, and was at all times able to disprove them.

No doubt it was; and it is certain, too, that the more diligent enquiries after truth did not in fact fall into these absurd notions; which, by the way, is an observation more to our purpose than theirs who usually make it, and shews, that though their reasonings were good, there always wanted something, which they could not supply, to give them such weight as would lay an obligation upon mankind to embrace them, and make that to be a law which otherwise was but an opinion without force.

Besides,—which is a more direct answer,—though 'tis true the ablest men gave no credit to the multiplicity of gods,—(for they had a religion for themselves, and another for the populace,) yet they were guilty of what in effect was equally bad, in holding an opinion which necessarily supported these very mistakes,—namely, that as different nations had different gods, it was every man's duty (I suppose, more for quietness than principle's sake) to worship the gods of his country; which, by the way, considering their numbers, was not so easy a task;—for what with celestial gods, and gods aërial, terrestrial and infernal, with the goddesses their wives and mistresses, upon the lowest computation, the heathen world acknowledged no less than thirty thousand deities, all which claimed the rights and ceremonies of religious worship!

But 'twill be said, allowing the bulk of mankind were under such delusions,—they were still but speculative.—What was that to their practice? However defective in their theology and more abstracted points, their morality was no way connected with it.—There is no need that the everlasting laws of

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justice and mercy should be fetched down from above, —since they can be proved from more obvious mediums;—they were as necessary for the same good purposes of society then as now; and we may presume they saw their interest, and pursued it.

That the necessities of society, and the impossibilities of its subsisting otherwise, would point out the convenience, or, if you will,—the duty of social virtues is unquestionable:—but I firmly deny, that therefore religion and morality are independent of each other: they appear so far from it, that I cannot conceive how the one, in the true and meritorious sense of the duty, can act without the influence of the other: surely the most exalted motive which can only be depended upon for the uniform practice of virtue,—must come down from *above*,—from the love and imitation of the goodness of that Being in whose sight we wish to render ourselves acceptable: this will operate at all times and all places,—in the darkest closet, as much as on the greatest and most public theatres of the world.

But with different conceptions of the Deity, or such impure ones as they entertained, is it to be doubted, whether, in the many secret trials of our virtue, we should not determine our cases of conscience with much the same kind of casuistry as that of the Libertine in Terence, who being engaged in a very unjustifiable pursuit, and happening to see a picture which represented a known story of Jupiter in a like transaction,—argued the matter thus within himself:—If the great Jupiter could not restrain his appetites, and deny himself an indulgence of this kind—*ego Homuncio hoc non facerem?* shall I, a mortal,—an inconsiderable mortal too, clothed with infirmities of flesh and blood,—pretend

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to a virtue which the Father of gods and men could not? What insolence!

The conclusion was natural enough; and as so great a master of nature puts it into the mouth of one of his principal characters, no doubt the language was then understood; it was copied from common life, and was not the first application which had been made of the story.

It will scarce admit of a question, Whether vice would not naturally grow bold upon the credit of such an example; or whether such impressions did not influence the lives and morals of many in the heathen world: and had there been no other proof of it, but the natural tendency of such notions to corrupt them, it had been sufficient reason to believe it was so.

No doubt, there is sufficient room for amendment in the Christian world; and we may be said to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men, considering what motives we have, from the purity of our religion, and the force of its sanctions, to make us better:—yet still I affirm, that if these restraints were taken off, the world would be infinitely worse; and though some sense of morality might be preserved, as it was in the heathen world, with the more considerate of us, yet in general I am persuaded, that the bulk of mankind, upon such a supposition, would soon come to 'live without God in the 'world,' and in a short time differ from Indians themselves in little else but their complexions.

If, after all, the Christian religion has not left a sufficient provision against the wickedness of the world,—the short and true answer is this, That there can be none.

It is sufficient to leave us without excuse, that the

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excellency of this institution, in its doctrine, its precepts, and its examples, has a proper tendency to make us a virtuous and a happy people;—every page is an address to our hearts, to win them to these purposes;—but as religion was not intended to work upon men by force and natural necessity, but by moral persuasion, which sets good and evil before them,—so that if men have power to do the evil and chuse the good,—and will abuse it,—this cannot be avoided.—Religion ever implies a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world which have it, were created free to stand and free to fall;—and therefore men who will not be persuaded by this way of address, must expect, and be contented to be reckoned with according to the talents they have received.

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SERMON XXVII.

THE ABUSES OF CONSCIENCE CONSIDERED.

HEBREWS xiii. 18.

—For we trust we have a good conscience.—

TRUST!—Trust we have a good Conscience!—Surely, you will say, if there is any thing in this life which a man may depend upon, and to the knowledge of which he is capable of arriving upon the most indisputable evidence, it must be this very thing,—Whether he has a good Conscience, or no.

If a man thinks at all, he cannot well be a stranger to the true state of this account:—he must be privy to his own thoughts and desires—he must remember his past pursuits, and know certainly the true springs and motives which, in general, have governed the actions of his life.

In other matters we may be deceived by false appearances; and as the wise man complains, 'Hardly 'do we guess right at the things that are upon the 'earth, and with labour do we find the things that 'are before us:'—but here the mind has all the evidence and facts within herself;—is conscious of the web she has wove;—knows its texture and fineness; and the exact share which every passion has had in working upon the several designs which virtue or vice has plann'd before her.

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Now,—as Conscience is nothing else but the knowledge which the mind has within itself of this; and the judgment, either of approbation or censure, which it unavoidably makes upon the successive actions of our lives,—'tis plain, you will say, from the very terms of the proposition, whenever this inward testimony goes against a man, and he stands self-accused,—that he must necessarily be a *guilty man.* And, on the contrary, when the report is favourable on his side, and his heart condemns him not,—that is not a matter of *trust*, as the Apostle intimates, but a matter of certainty and fact, that the 'Conscience is 'good,' and that the *man* must be *good* also.

At first sight, this may seem to be a true state of the case; and I make no doubt, but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impress'd upon the mind of man, that did no such thing ever happen, as that the conscience of a man, by long habits of sin, might (as the Scripture assures us it may) insensibly become hard; and, like some tender parts of the body, by much stress, and continual hard usage, lose, by degrees, that nice sense and perception with which God and nature endowed it:—Did this never happen?—or was it certain that self-love could never hang the least bias upon the judgment;—or that the little interests below could rise up and perplex the faculties of our upper regions, and encompass them about with clouds and thick darkness?—could no such thing as favour and affection enter this sacred court?—did Wit disdain to take a bribe in it, or was ashamed to shew its face as an advocate for an unwarrantable enjoyment?—or, lastly, were we assured that Interest stood always unconcerned whilst the cause was hearing;—and that Passion never got into the judgment-seat, and pronounced

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sentence in the stead of Reason, which is supposed always to preside and determine upon the case?—Was this truly so, as the objection must suppose,—no doubt, then, the religious and moral state of a man would be exactly what he himself esteemed it; and the guilt or innocence of every man's life could be known, in general, by no better measure than the degrees of his own approbation or censure.

I own, in one case, whenever a man's conscience does accuse him, (as it seldom errs on that side) that he is guilty;—and, unless in melancholy and hypochondriac cases, we may safely pronounce that there is always sufficient grounds for the accusation.

But the converse of the proposition will not hold true; namely, That wherever there is guilt, the conscience must accuse; and, if it does not, that a man is therefore innocent.—This is not the fact:—so that the common consolation which some good Christian or other is hourly administering to himself,—That he thanks GOD his mind does not misgive him; and that, consequently, he has a good conscience, because he has a quiet one;—as current as the inference is, and as infallible as the rule appears at first sight, yet, when you look nearer to it, and try the truth of this rule upon plain facts, you find it liable to so much error, from a false application of it;—the principle on which it goes so often perverted;—the whole force of it lost, and sometimes so vilely cast away, that it is painful to produce the common examples from human life, which confirm this account.

A man shall be vicious and utterly debauched in his principles; exceptionable in his conduct to the world: shall live shameless,——in the open commission of a sin which no reason or pretence can

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justify;—a sin, by which, contrary to all the workings of humanity within, he shall ruin for ever the deluded partner of his guilt,——rob her of her best dowry,——and not only cover her own head with dishonour, but involve a whole virtuous family in shame and sorrow for her sake.——Surely,——you'll think, Conscience must lead such a man a troublesome life:——he can have no rest, night nor day, from its reproaches.

Alas! Conscience has something else to do all this time than break in upon him: as *Elijah* reproached the god *Baal*, this *domestic god* was either *talking or pursuing, or was in a journey, or, peradventure, he slept, and could not be awoke.* Perhaps he was gone out, in company with HONOUR, to fight a duel;—— to pay off some debt at play,——or dirty annuity, the bargain of his lust.——Perhaps Conscience all this time was engaged at home, talking aloud against petty larceny, and executing vengeance upon some such puny crimes as his fortune and rank in life secured him against all temptation of committing: ——so that he lives as merrily,——sleeps as soundly in his bed;——and, at the last, meets death with as much unconcern,——perhaps, much more so, than a much better man.

Another is sordid, unmerciful;—a strait-hearted, selfish wretch, incapable either of private friendships or public spirit.——Take notice how he passes by the widow and orphan in their distress; and sees all the miseries incident to human life without a sigh or a prayer.——Shall not Conscience rise up and sting him, on such occasions? No.—Thank GOD, there is no occasion. 'I pay every man his own;——I have 'no fornication to answer to my Conscience, no faith-'less vows or promises to make up;—I have de-

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'bauch'd no man's wife or child.——Thank GOD, I 'am not as other men, adulterers, unjust, or even 'as this libertine who stands before me.'

A third is crafty and designing in his nature.—— View his whole life,—'tis nothing else but a cunning contexture of dark arts and unequitable subterfuges, basely to defeat the true intent of all laws, plain-dealing, and the safe enjoyment of our several properties.——You will see such a one working out a frame of little designs upon the ignorance and perplexities of the poor and needy man;——shall raise a fortune upon the inexperience of youth,——or the unsuspecting temper of his friend, who would have trusted him with his life. When old age comes on, and repentance calls him to look back upon this black account, and state it over again with his Conscience —— Conscience looks into the *Statutes at Large*,——finds, perhaps, no *express law* broken by what he has done;——perceives no penalty or forfeiture incurred;——sees no scourge waving over his head,——or prison opening its gate upon him.—— What is there to affright his conscience?—— Conscience has got safely entrench'd behind the letter of the law, sits there invulnerable, fortified with *cases* and *reports* so strongly on all sides,——that 'tis not preaching can dispossess it of its hold.

Another shall want even this refuge,——shall break through all this ceremony of slow chicane; scorns the doubtful workings of secret plots and cautious trains to bring about his purpose.——See the bare-faced villain, how he cheats, lies, perjures, robs, murders!—— Horrid! But indeed much better was not to be expected in this case,——the poor man was in the dark!——His priest had got the keeping of his conscience; and all he had let him know of it was, That

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he must believe in the *Pope;*—go to mass;—cross himself;——tell his beads;—be a good Catholic; and that this in all conscience was enough to carry him to heaven. What!——if he perjures?——Why,——he had a mental reservation in it. But if he is so wicked and abandoned a wretch as you represent him,——and if he robs or murders, will not conscience, on every such act, receive a wound itself?——Ay——But the man has carried it to confession, the wound digests there, and will do well enough,——and in a short time be quite healed up by absolution.

O *Popery!* what hast thou to answer for!——when not content with the too many natural and fatal ways through which the heart is every day thus treacherous to itself above all things,——thou hast wilfully set open this wide gate of deceit before the face of this unwary *Traveller*,——too apt, God knows, to go astray of himself, and confidently speak peace to his soul when there is no peace.

Of this, the common instances, which I have drawn out of life, are too notorious to require much evidence. If any man doubts the reality of them, or thinks it impossible for man to be such a bubble to himself,—I must refer him a moment to his reflections, and shall then venture to trust the appeal to his own heart. Let him consider in how different a degree of detestation numbers of wicked actions stand *there*, though equally bad and vicious in their own natures;——he will soon find that such of them as strong inclination or custom have prompted him to commit, are generally dress'd out and painted with all the false beauties which a soft and flattering hand can give them; and that others, to which he feels no propensity, appear, at once, naked and deformed, surrounded with all the true circumstances of folly and dishonour.

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When David surprised Saul sleeping in the cave, and cut off the skirt of his robe,—we read, his heart smote him for what he had done.——But, in the matter of Uriah, where a faithful and gallant servant, whom he ought to have loved and honour'd, fell to make way for his lust; where *Conscience* had so much greater reason to take the alarm,——his heart smote him not. ——A whole year had almost passed from the first commission of that crime——to the time Nathan was sent to reprove him; and we read not once of the least sorrow or compunction of heart, which he testified during all that time, for what he had done.

Thus Conscience, this once able monitor,—placed on high as a judge within us,—and intended, by our Maker, as a just and equitable one too,—by an unhappy train of causes and impediments,——takes often such imperfect cognizance of what passes,——does its office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly, that it is not to be trusted alone: and, therefore, we find there is a necessity, an absolute necessity, of joining another principle with it, to aid, if not govern, its determinations.

So that if you form a just judgment of what is of infinite importance to you not to be misled in, namely, in what degree of real merit you stand, either as an honest man,—an useful citizen——a faithful subject to your king,——or a good servant to your God,—— call in Religion and Morality.——Look——What is written in the law of God?——How readest thou? ——Consult calm reason, and the unchangeable obligations of justice and truth:——What say they?

Let Conscience determine the matter upon these reports,——and then, if *thy heart condemn thee not*, ——*which is the case the Apostle supposes*—— the rule will be infallible——*Thou wilt have confidence towards God;*——that is, have just grounds to

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believe the judgment thou has past upon thyself *is* the judgment of God; and nothing else but an anticipation of that righteous sentence, which will be pronounced, hereafter, upon thee, by that Being, before whom thou art finally to give an account of thy actions.

Blessed is the man, indeed, then, as the author of the book of *Ecclesiasticus* expresses it, *who is not pricked with the multitude of his sins!—Blessed is the man whose heart had not condemned him, and who is not fallen from his hope in the Lord! Whether he be rich*, continues he, *or whether he be poor*,——*if he have a good heart* (a heart thus guided and inform'd)——*he shall at all times rejoice in a cheerful countenance*——*his mind shall tell him more than seven watchmen that sit above upon a tower on high.* In the darkest doubts, it shall conduct him safer than a thousand casuists; and give the state he lives in, a better security for his behaviour, than all the clauses and restrictions put together, which the wisdom of the legislature is forced to multiply,——forced, I say, as things stand; human laws being not a matter of original choice, but of pure necessity, brought in to fence against the mischievous effects of Consciences which are no law unto themselves; wisely intending, by the many provisions made, That in all such corrupt or misguided cases, where principle and the checks of Conscience will not make us upright,—to supply their force, and, by the terrors of jails and halters, oblige us to it.

To have the fear of God before our eyes; and, in our mutual dealings with each other, to govern our actions by the eternal measures of right and wrong; ——the first of these will comprehend the duties of religion; the second, those of morality: which are so inseparably connected together, that you cannot divide

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these two *Tables*, even in imagination (though the attempt is often made in practice), without breaking and mutually destroying them both.

I said, the attempt is often made;——and so it is; there being nothing more common, than to see a man, who has no sense at all of religion,——and indeed has *so much* of honesty as to pretend to none,—who would yet take it as the bitterest affront, should you but hint a suspicion of his moral character,——or imagine he was not conscientiously just, and scrupulous to the uttermost mite.

When there is some appearance that it is so,—— though one is not willing even to suspect the appearance of so great a virtue as moral honesty,—yet, were we to look into the grounds of it in the present case, I am persuaded we should find little reason to envy such a man the honour of his motive.

Let him declaim as pompously as he can on the subject, it will be found at last to rest upon no better foundation than either his interest, his pride, his ease, or some such little and changeable passion, as will give us but small dependence upon his actions in matters of great stress.

Give me leave to illustrate this, by an example.

I know the banker I deal with, or the physician I usually call in, to be neither of them men of much religion: I hear them make a jest of it every day, and treat all its sanctions with so much scorn and contempt, as to put the matter past doubt. Well,—— notwithstanding this, I put my fortune into the hands of the one, and, what is dearer still to me, I trust my life to the honest skill of the other.——Now, let me examine what is my reason for this great confidence.——Why,—in the first place, I believe that there is no probability that either of them will employ

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the power, I put it into their hands, to my disadvantage. I consider that honesty serves the purposes of this life;——I know their success in the world depends upon the fairness of their character;—— that they cannot hurt me without hurting themselves more.

But put it otherwise; namely, that interest lay for once on the other side;——that a case should happen wherein the one, without stain to his reputation, could secrete my fortune, and leave me naked in the world; —or that the other could send me out of it, and enjoy an estate by my death, without dishonour to himself or his art.——In this case, what hold have I of either of them?——Religion, the strongest of all motives, is out of the question.——Interest, the next most powerful motive in this world, is strongly against me. ——I have nothing left to cast into the scale, to balance this temptation.——I must lie at the mercy of honour,——or some such capricious principle.— Strait security! for two of my best and most valuable blessings,——my property and my life!

As therefore we can have no dependence upon morality without religion;——so, on the other hand, there is nothing better to be expected from religion without morality; nor can any man be supposed to discharge his duties to God, (whatever fair appearances he may hang out, that he does so) if he does not pay as conscientious a regard to the duties which he owes his fellow-creature.

This is a point capable in itself of strict demonstration.——Nevertheless, 'tis no rarity to see a man whose real moral merit stands very low, who yet entertains the highest notion of himself, in the light of a devout and religious man. He shall not only be covetous, revengeful, implacable, —— but even

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wanting in points of common honesty:——yet, because he talks loud against the infidelity of the age,——is zealous for some points of religion,——goes twice a day to church, attends the sacraments, and amuses himself with a few instrumental duties of religion,——shall cheat his conscience into a judgment, that for this he is a religious man, and has discharged faithfully his duty to God: and you will find that such a man, through force of this delusion, generally looks down with spiritual pride upon every other man who has less affectation of piety, though, perhaps, ten times more moral honesty than himself.

This is likewise a sore evil under the sun;

and I believe there is no one mistaken principle which, for its time, has wrought more serious mischiefs. For a general proof of this, examine the history of the *Romish* Church.—See what scenes of cruelty, murders, rapines, bloodshed, have all been sanctified by a religion not strictly governed by morality!

In how many kingdoms of the world has the crusading sword of this misguided Saint-Errant spared neither age, nor merit, nor sex, nor condition!—— And, as he fought under the banners of a religion which set him loose from justice and humanity,—— he shewed none,——mercilessly trampled upon both, heard neither the cries of the unfortunate, nor pitied their distresses.

If the testimony of past centuries in this matter is not sufficient,——consider, at this instant, how the votaries of that religion are every day thinking to do service and honour to God, by actions which are a dishonour and scandal to themselves.

To be convinced of this, go with me for a moment into the prisons of the Inquisition.——Behold *Religion*, with Mercy and Justice chain'd down under her feet,

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there sitting ghastly upon a black tribunal, propp'd up with racks and instruments of torment!——Hark! ——what a piteous groan!—See the melancholy wretch who utter'd it, just brought forth to undergo the anguish of a mock-trial, and endure the utmost pains that a studied system of *religious cruelty* has been able to invent! Behold this helpless victim delivered up to the tormentors: his body so wasted with sorrow and long confinement, you'll see every nerve and muscle as it suffers!—Observe the last movement of that horrid engine.——What convulsions it has thrown him into! Consider the nature of the posture in which he now lies stretch'd.——What exquisite torture he endures by it!—'Tis all nature can bear. ———Good God! see how it keeps his weary soul hanging on his trembling lips, willing to take its leave, —but not suffered to depart. Behold the unhappy wretch led back to his cell,——dragg'd out of it again to meet the flames,——and the insults in his last agonies, which this principle——this principle, that there can be religion without morality, has prepared for him!

The surest way to try the merit of any disputed notion,——is, to trace down the consequences such a notion has produced, and compare them with the *spirit* of Christianity.——'Tis the short and decisive rule, which our Saviour has left for these and such like cases,——and is worth a thousand arguments:—*By their fruits*, says he, *ye shall know them.*

Thus Religion and Morality, like fast friends and natural allies, can never be set at variance, without the mutual ruin and dishonour of them both;——and whoever goes about this unfriendly office, is no well-wisher to either;——and, whatever he pretends, he deceives his own heart, and, I fear, his morality, as well as his religion, will be vain.

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I will add no farther to the length of this discourse than by two or three short and independent rules, deducible from what has been said.

First, Whenever a man talks loudly against religion, always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions which have got the better of his creed.—A *bad life* and a *good belief* are disagreeable and troublesome neighbours; and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other cause but quietness sake.

Secondly, When a man, thus represented, tells you, in any particular instance, that such a thing goes *against* his conscience,——always believe he means exactly the same thing as when he tells you such a thing goes against his stomach,——a present want of appetite being generally the true cause of both.

In a word,——trust that man in nothing——who has not a conscience in every thing.

And in your own case, remember this plain distinction, a mistake in which has ruin'd thousands,——That your conscience is not a law;—no,—God and reason made the law, and has placed Conscience within you to determine,—not like an *Asiatic Cadi*, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions; but like a *British judge* in this land of liberty, who makes no new law,——but faithfully declares that glorious law which he finds already written.

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SERMON XXVIII.

TEMPORAL ADVANTAGES OF RELIGION.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

THERE are two opinions which the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust.—The first is—a vicious life is a life of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages.—The second is—and which is the converse of the first—that a religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state.

The first breach which the Devil made upon human innocence, was by the help of these suggestions, when he told Eve, that by eating of the tree of knowledge she should be as God, that is, she should reap some high and strange felicity from doing what was forbidden her.—But I need not repeat the success:—Eve learnt the difference between good and evil by her transgression, which she knew not before;—but then she fatally learnt, at the same time, that the difference was only this,—That GOOD is that which can only give the mind pleasure and comfort;—and that EVIL is that which must necessarily be attended, sooner or later, with shame and sorrow.

As the deceiver of mankind thus began his triumph over our race—so has he carried it on, ever since, by the very same argument of delusion;——that is, by

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possessing men's minds early with great expectations of the present incomes of sin,——making them dream of wondrous gratifications they are to feel in following their appetites in a forbidden way,—making them fancy, that their own grapes yield not so delicious a taste as their neighbour's; and that they shall quench their thirst with more pleasure at his fountain, than at their own. This is the opinion which at first too generally prevails,—till experience and proper seasons of reflection make us all at one time or other confess,—that our counsellor has been (as from the beginning) an impostor,——and that, instead of fulfilling these hopes of gain and sweetness in what is forbidden—that, on the contrary, every unlawful enjoyment leads only to bitterness and loss.

The second opinion, or, That a religious life is a servile and uncomfortable state, has proved a no less fatal and capital false principle in the conduct of inexperience through life;—the foundation of which mistake arising chiefly from this previous wrong judgment,—that true happiness and freedom lie in a man's always following his own humour;—that to live by moderate and prescribed rules, is to live without joy;——that not to prosecute our passions is to be cowards—and to forego every thing for the tedious distance of a future life.

Was it true, that a virtuous man could have no pleasure but what should arise from that remote prospect,——I own we are, by nature, so goaded on by the desire of present happiness, that was that the case, thousands would faint under the discouragement of so remote an expectation.——But, in the mean time, the Scriptures give us a very different prospect of this matter.—There we are told, that the service of God is true liberty,—that the yoke of Christianity is easy

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in comparison of that yoke which must be brought upon us by any other system of living;—and the text tells of Wisdom—by which is meant Religion, that it has pleasantness in its way, as well as glory in its end, ——that it will bring us peace and joy, such as the world cannot give.—So that, upon examining the truth of this assertion, we shall be set right in this error, by seeing that a religious man's happiness does not stand at so tedious a distance,—but is so present, and indeed so inseparable from him, as to be felt and tasted every hour;—and of this even the vicious can hardly be insensible, from any casual act of virtue. And though it is a pleasure that properly belongs to the good,—yet let any one try the experiment, and he will see what is meant by that moral delight arising from the conscience of well-doing.—Let him but refresh the bowels of the needy—let him comfort the broken-hearted—or check an appetite—or overcome a temptation—or receive an affront with temper and meekness, and he shall find the tacit praise of what he has done, darting through his mind, accompanied with a sincere pleasure—conscience playing the monitor even to the loose and most inconsiderate, in their most casual acts of well-doing, and is, like a voice, whispering behind, and saying,—This is the way of pleasantness,—this is the path of peace—walk in it.

But to do further justice to the text, we must look beyond this inward recompence which is always inseparable from virtue,—and take a view of the outward advantages, which are as inseparable from it, and which the apostle particularly refers to, when 'tis said, Godliness has the promise of this life, as well as that which is to come;—and in this argument it is, that religion appears in all its glory and strength—unanswerable in all its obligations;—that besides the prin-

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cipal work which it does for us in securing our future well-being in the other world, it is likewise the most effectual means to promote our present;—and that not only *morally*, upon account of that reward which virtuous actions do entitle a man unto from a just and a wise Providence,—but by a natural tendency in themselves, which the duties of religion have, *to procure* us riches, health, reputation, credit, and all those things wherein our temporal happiness is thought to consist; and this not only in promoting the well-being of particular persons, but of public communities and of mankind in general,—agreeable to what the wise man has left us on record, that righteousness exalteth a nation:—insomuch, that could we, in considering this argument, suppose ourselves to be in a capacity of expostulating with God, concerning the terms upon which we would submit to His government,—and to chuse the laws ourselves which we would be bound to observe,—it would be impossible for the wit of man to frame any other proposals which, upon all accounts, would be more advantageous to our own interests than those very conditions to which we are obliged by the rules of religion and virtue.—And in this does the reasonableness of Christianity, and the beauty and wisdom of Providence, appear most eminently towards mankind, in governing us by such laws as do most apparently tend to make us happy;—and, in a word, in making that (in His mercy) to be our duty, which, in his wisdom, He knows to be our interest,—that is to say, what is most conducive to the ease and comfort of our mind,—the health and strength of our body,—the honour and prosperity of our state and condition,—the friendship and good-will of our fellow-creatures;—to the attainment of all which, no more effectual means can

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possibly be made use of, than that plain direction,—to lead an uncorrupted life, and to do the thing which is right, to use no deceit in our tongue, nor do evil to our neighbour.

For the better imprinting of which truth in your memories, give me leave to offer a few things to your consideration.

The first is,—that justice and honesty contribute very much towards all the faculties of the mind: I mean, that it clears up the understanding from that mist which dark and crooked designs are apt to raise in it,—and that it keeps up a regularity in the affections, by suffering no lusts or *bye-ends* to disorder them. That it likewise preserves the mind from all damps of grief and melancholy, which are the sure consequences of unjust actions; and that, by such an improvement of the faculties, it makes a man so much the abler to discern, and so much the more cheerful, active, and diligent to mind his business.—Light is sown for the righteous, says the prophet, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Secondly, let it be observed,—that in the continuance and course of a virtuous man's affairs, there is little probability of his falling into considerable disappointments, or calamities; — not only because guarded by the providence of God, but that honesty is in its own nature the freest from danger.

First, Because such a one lays no projects which it is the interest of another to blast, and therefore needs no indirect methods or deceitful practices to secure his interest by undermining others.—The paths of virtue are plain and straight; so that the blind, persons of the meanest capacity, shall not err.—Dishonesty requires skill to conduct it, and as great art to conceal—what 'tis every one's interest to detect.

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And I think I need not remind you, how oft it happens in attempts of this kind — where worldly men, in haste to be rich, have overrun the only means to it, — and for want of laying their contrivances with proper cunning, or managing them with proper secrecy and advantage, have lost, for ever, what they might have certainly secured by honesty and plain-dealing;—the general causes of the disappointments in their business, or of unhappiness in their lives, lying but too manifestly in their own disorderly passions; which, by attempting to carry them a shorter way to riches and honour, disappoint them of both for ever, and make plain their ruin is from themselves, and that they eat the fruits which their own hands have watered and ripened.

Consider, in the third place, that as the religious and moral man (one of which he cannot be without the other) not only takes the surest course for success in his affairs, but is disposed to procure a help which never enters into the thoughts of a wicked one; for being conscious of upright intentions, he can look towards Heaven, and with some assurance recommend his affairs to God's blessing and direction; whereas the fraudulent and dishonest man dares not call for God's blessing upon his designs,—or if he does, he knows it is in vain to expect it.—Now a man who believes that he has God on his side, acts with another sort of life and courage than he who knows he stands alone; — like Esau with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against his.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Consider, in the fourth place, that in all good go-

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vernments, who understood their own interest, the upright and honest man stands much fairer for preferment, and much more likely to be employed in all things where fidelity is wanted;—for all men, however the case stands with themselves, they love at least to find honesty in those they trust; nor is there any usage we more hardly digest, than that of being outwitted and deceived.—This is so true an observation, that the greatest knaves have no other way to get into business, but by counterfeiting honesty, and pretending to be what they are not: and when the imposture is discovered, as it is a thousand to one but it will, I have just said what must be the certain consequence:—for when such a one falls,—as he has none to help him, so he seldom rises again.

This brings us to a fifth particular, in vindication of the text, — That a virtuous man has this strong advantage on his side (the reverse of the last), that the more and the longer he is known, so much the better he is loved, so much the more trusted;—so that his reputation and his fortune have a gradual increase:—and if calamities or cross accidents should bear him down, — (as no one stands out of their reach in this world)—if he should fall, who would not pity his distress,—who would not stretch forth his hand to raise him from the ground? —wherever there was virtue, he might expect to meet a friend and a brother. — And this is not merely speculation, but fact, confirmed by numberless examples in life, of men falling into misfortunes whose character and tried probity have raised them helps, and borne them up, when every other help has forsook them.

Lastly, to sum up the account of the temporal ad-

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vantages which probity has on its side,—let us not forget that greatest of all happiness, which the text refers to—in the expression, of all its paths being peace, peace and content of mind, arising from the consciousness of virtue, which is the true and only foundation of all earthly satisfaction; and where that is wanting, whatever other enjoyments you bestow upon a wicked man, they will as soon add a cubit to his stature as to his happiness.—In the midst of the highest entertainments,—this, like the hand-writing upon the wall, will be enough to spoil and disrelish the feast; but much more so, when the tumult and hurry of delight is over,—when all is still and silent,—when the sinner has nothing to do but attend its lashes and remorses;—and this, in spite of all the common arts of diversion, will be often the case of every wicked man;—for we cannot live always upon the stretch;—our faculties will not bear constant pleasure any more than constant pain;—there will be some vacancies; and when there are, they will be sure to be filled with uncomfortable thoughts and black reflections:—so that, setting aside the great after-reckoning, the pleasures of the wicked are over-bought even in this world.

I conclude with one observation upon the whole of this argument, which is this:—

Notwithstanding the great force with which it has often been urged by good writers, there are many cases which it may not reach, wherein vicious men may seem to enjoy their portion of this life, and live as happy, and fall into as few troubles as other men;—and therefore it is prudent not to lay more stress upon this argument than it will bear:—but always remember to call in to our aid that great and more unanswerable argument, which will answer the most dreadful cases

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which can be stated,—and that is, the certainty of a future life, which Christianity has brought to light. However men may differ in their opinions of the usefulness of virtue for our present purposes, no one was ever so absurd as to deny it served our best and our last interest,—when the little interests of this life were at an end. Upon which consideration we should always lay the great weight which it is fittest to bear, as the strongest appeal, and most unchangeable motive that can govern our actions at all times.—However, as every good argument on the side of religion should in proper times be made use of,—it is fit sometimes to examine this,—by proving virtue is not even destitute of a present reward,—but carries in her hand a sufficient recompence for all the self-denials she may occasion:—she is pleasant in the way as well as in the end;—her ways being ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.—But it is her greatest and most distinguished glory,—that she befriends us hereafter, and brings us peace at the last; and this is a portion she can never be disinherited of,—which may God of his mercy grant us all, for the sake of Jesus Christ!

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SERMON XXIX.

OUR CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN.

PHILIP. iii. 20. 1st Part.

For our conversation is in heaven.

THESE words are the conclusion of the account which St. Paul renders of himself, to justify that particular part of his conduct and proceeding,—his leaving so strangely, and deserting his Jewish rites and ceremonies to which he was known to have been formerly so much attached, and in defence of which he had been so warmly and so remarkably engaged. This, as it had been matter of provocation against him amongst his own countrymen the Jews, so was it no less an occasion of surprise to the Gentiles;—that a person of his great character, interest, and reputation, one who was descended from a tribe of Israel, deeply skilled in the professions, and zealous in the 'observances of the 'straitest sect of that religion;' who had their tenets instilled into him from his tender years, under the institution of the ablest masters;—a Pharisee himself,—the son of a Pharisee,—and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; one that was so deeply interested, and an accessary in the persecution of another religion just then newly come up;—a religion to which his whole sect, as well as himself, had been always the bitterest

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and most inveterate enemies; and were constantly upbraided as such by the first founder of it!—that a person so beset and hemm'd in with interests and prejudices on all sides, should, after all, turn proselyte to the very religion he had hated;—a religion, too, under the most universal contempt of any then in the world,—the chiefs and leaders of it men of the lowest birth and education, without any advantages of parts or learning, or other endowments to recommend them;—that he should quit and abandon all his former privileges, to become merely a fellow-labourer with these;—that he should give up the reputation he had acquired amongst his brethren by the study and labours of a whole life;—that he should give up his friends, his relations, his family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life;—this was an event so very extraordinary, so odd and unaccountable,—that it might well confound the minds of men to answer for it.—It was not to be accounted for upon the common rules and regulations of proceeding in human life.

The apostle, therefore, since no one else could do it so well for him, comes, in this chapter, to give an explanation why he had thus forsaken so many worldly advantages,—which was owing to a greater and more unconquerable affection to a better and more valuable interest,—that, in the poor persecuted faith,—which he had once reproached and destroyed he had now found such a fullness of divine grace,—such unfathomable depths of God's infinite mercy and love towards mankind, that he could think nothing too much to part with in order to his embracing Christianity;—nay, he accounted all things but loss,—that is, less than nothing, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle, after this apology for himself, proceeds,

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in the second verse before the text, to give a very different representation of the worldly views and sensual principles of other pretending teachers,—who had set themselves up as an example for men to walk by, against whom he renews this caution:—For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ,—whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things,—Φρονοῦντες,—relish them, making them, the only object of their wishes, taking aim at nothing better, and nothing higher;—but *our* conversation, says he in the text, is in heaven. We Christians, who have embraced a persecuted faith, are governed by other considerations,—have greater and nobler views; here we consider ourselves only as pilgrims and strangers.—Our home is in another country, where we are continually tending; there our hearts and affections are placed; and when the few days of our pilgrimage shall be over, there shall we return, where a quiet habitation and a perpetual rest is designed and prepared for us for ever.—Our conversation is in heaven; from whence, says he, we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto him.—It is observable, that St. Peter represents the state of Christians under the same image, of strangers upon earth, whose city and proper home is heaven:—he makes use of that relation of citizens of heaven, as a strong argument for a pure and holy life,—beseeching them *as* pilgrims and strangers *here;* as men whose interests and connections are of so short a date, and so trifling a nature,—to abstain from fleshy lusts, which war

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against the soul (that is, unfit it for its heavenly country), and give it a disrelish to the enjoyment of that pure and spiritualised happiness, of which that religion must consist, wherein there shall no wise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination.—The apostle tells us, that without holiness no man shall see God;—by which, no doubt, he means, that a virtuous life is the only medium of happiness and terms of salvation, which can only give us admission into heaven. But some of our divines carry the assertion further, that without holiness—without some previous similitude wrought in the faculties of the mind, corresponding with the nature of the the purest of beings, who is to be the object of our fruition hereafter—that it is not morally only, but physically impossible for it to be happy!—and that an impure and polluted soul is not only unworthy of so pure a presence as the spirit of God, but even incapable of enjoying it, could it be admitted.

And here, not to feign a long hypothesis, as some have done, of a sinner's being admitted into heaven, with a particular description of his condition and behaviour there,—we need only consider, that the supreme good, like any other good, is of a relative nature, and, consequently, the enjoyment of it must require some qualification in the faculty, as well as the enjoyment of any other good does;—there must be something antecedent in the disposition and temper, which will render that good a good to that individual;—otherwise, though (it is true) it may be possessed,—yet it can never be enjoyed.

Preach to a voluptuous epicure, who knows of no other happiness in this world but what arises from good eating and drinking;—such a one, in the apostle's language, whose God is his belly;—preach to him of

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the abstractions of the soul, tell of its flights and brisker motion in the pure regions of immensity;—represent to him that saints and angels eat not,—but that the spirit of a man lives for ever upon wisdom and holiness, and heavenly contemplations; — why, the only effect would be, that the fat glutton would stare awhile upon the preacher, and in a few minutes fall fast asleep.—No; if you would catch his attention, and make him take in your discourse greedily,—you must preach to him out of the Alcoran,—talk of the raptures of sensual enjoyments, and of the pleasures of the perpetual feasting which Mahomet has described;—there you touch upon a note which awakens and sinks into the inmost recesses of his soul;—without which, discourse as wisely and abstractedly as you will of heaven, your representations of it, however glorious and exalted, will pass like the songs of melody over an ear incapable of discerning the distinction of sounds.

We see, even in the common intercourses of society, how tedious it is to be in the company of a person whose humour is disagreeable to our own, though, perhaps, in all other respects of the greatest worth and excellency.—How then can we imagine that an ill-disposed soul, whose conversation never reached to heaven, but whose appetites and desires, to the last hour, have grovell'd upon this unclean spot of earth;—how can we imagine it should hereafter take pleasure in God, or be able to taste joy or satisfaction from His presence, who is so infinitely pure that He even putteth no trust in his saints, — nor are the heavens themselves (as Job says) clean in His sight?—The consideration of this has led some writers so far as to say, with some degree of irreverence in the expression,—that it was not in the power of God to

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make a wicked man happy, if the soul was separated from the body, with all its vicious habits and inclinations unreformed;——which thought a very able divine in our church has pursued so far, as to declare his belief,—that could the happiest mansion in heaven be supposed to be allotted to a gross and polluted spirit, it would be so far from being happy in it, that it would do penance there to all eternity:—by which he meant, it would carry such appetites along with it, for which there could be found no suitable objects:—A sufficient cause for constant torment;—for those that it found there would be so disproportioned, that they would rather vex and upbraid it, than satisfy its wants.—This, it is true, is mere speculation,—and what concerns us not to know;—it being enough for our purpose, that such an experiment is never likely to be tried,—that we stand upon different terms with God,—that a virtuous life is the foundation of all our happiness;—that as God has no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall any evil dwell with him;—and that, if we expect our happiness to be in heaven, we must have our conversation in heaven whilst upon earth,—make it the frequent subject of our thoughts and meditations,—let every step we take tend that way,—every action of our lives be conducted by that great mark of the prize of our high calling, forgetting those things which are behind;—forgetting this world;—disengaging our thoughts and affections from it, and thereby transforming them to the likeness of what we hope to be hereafter.—How can we expect the inheritance of the saints in light, upon other terms than what they themselves obtained it?———

Can that body expect to rise and shine in glory, that is a slave to lust, or dies in fiery pursuit of an impure desire? Can that heart ever become the

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lightsome seat of peace and joy, that burns hot as an oven with anger, rage, envy, lust, and strife, full of wicked imaginations, set only to devise and entertain evil?

Can that flesh appear in the last day and inherit the kingdom of Heaven in the glorified strength of perpetual youth, that is now clearly consumed in intemperance, sinks in the surfeit of continual drunkenness and gluttony, and then tumbles into the grave, and almost pollutes the ground that is under it?—Can we reasonably suppose that head shall ever wear or become the crown of righteousness and peace, in which dwells nothing but craft and avarice, deceit, and fraud, and treachery,—which is always plodding upon worldly designs,—racked with ambition,—rent asunder with discord,—ever delighting in mischief to others, and unjust advantages to itself?—Shall that tongue, which is the glory of a man when rightly directed,—be ever set to God's heavenly praises, and warble forth the harmonies of the blessed, that is now full of cursing and bitterness, backbiting, and slander, under which is ungodliness and vanity and the poison of asps?

Can it enter into our hearts even to hope that those hands can ever receive the reward of righteousness, that are full of blood, laden with the wages of iniquity, of theft, rapine, violence, extortion, or other unlawful gain? or that those feet shall ever be beautiful upon the mountains of light and joy, that were never shod with the preparation of the Gospel,—that have run quite out of the way of God's word—and made haste only to do evil?—No, surely.—In this sense,—he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.

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So inconsistent is the whole body of sin with the glories of the celestial body that shall be revealed hereafter,—and that in proportion as we fix the representations of these glories upon our minds, and in the more numerous particulars we do it,—the stronger the necessity as well as persuasion to deny ourselves all ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, as the only way to entitle us to that blessedness spoken of in the Revelation—of those who do His commandments, and have a right to the tree of life, and shall enter into the gates of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels—to the general assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,—who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

May God give us grace to live under the perpetual influence of this expectation,—that, by the habitual impression of these glories upon our imaginations, and the frequent sending forth our thoughts and employing them on the other world,—we may disentangle them from this;—and, by so having our conversation in heaven whilst we are here, we may be thought fit inhabitants for it hereafter,—that when God, at the last day, shall come with thousands and tens of thousands of his saints to judge the world, we may enter with them into happiness, and with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we may praise and magnify His glorious name, and enjoy His presence for ever! Amen.

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SERMON XXX.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD.

2 PETER, iii. 11.

Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

THE subject upon which St. Peter is discoursing in this chapter, is the certainty of Christ's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the representation he gives of it;—in which, in answer to the cavils of the scoffers in the latter days, concerning the delay of His coming, he tells them, that God is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to usward;—'that the day of the Lord 'will come as a thief in the night, in which the 'heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the 'elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, 'and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.'—Seeing then, says he, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—The inference is unavoidable,—at least in theory, however it fails in practice:—how widely these two differ, I intend to make the subject of this discourse; and though it is a melancholy comparison, to consider, 'what manner of

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'persons we really *are*,' with 'what manner of persons 'we *ought* to be;' yet, as the knowledge of the one is at least one step towards the improvement in the other, —the parallel will not be thought to want its use.

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recall to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle's argument, and, from a brief representation of the Christian religion, and the obligations it lays upon us, shew what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world, will, I fear, be able to discern but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.— Of all the ends and pursuits we are looking for, and hastening unto,—this would be the least suspected;— for, without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say, within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle, which the apostle lays stress on, and as little sense of religion,—as small a share of virtue (at least as little of the appearance of it) as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—The degeneracy of the times has been the common complaint of many ages;—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth the heart.— But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they studied at least to preserve the appearance of virtue;—public vice was branded with public infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The service of God was regularly attended, and religion not exposed to the reproaches of the scorner.

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How the case stands with us at present, in each of these particulars, it is grievous to report, and, perhaps, unacceptable to Religion herself: yet, as this is a season wherein it is fit we should be told of our faults, let us, for a moment, impartially consider the articles of this charge.

And, first, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at present upon the lives and behaviour of the present times;—concerning which I have said, that if we are to trust appearances, there is as little as can well be supposed to exist at all in a Christian country. Here I shall spare exclamations, and, avoiding all common-place railing upon the subject, confine myself to facts, such as every one who looks into the world, and makes any observations at all, will vouch for me.

Now, whatever are the degrees of real religion amongst us,—whatever they are, the appearances are strong against the charitable side of the question.

If religion is anywhere to be found, one would think it would be amongst those of the higher rank in life, whose education, and opportunities of knowing its great importance should have brought them over to its interest, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent in its example.—But, if you examine the fact, you will almost find it a test of a politer education, and a mark of more shining parts, to know nothing, and, indeed, care nothing at all about it; —or, if the subject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more sprightly wits,—that it serves no other purpose but that of being made merry at, and of being reserved as a standing jest, to enliven discourse, when conversation sickens upon their hands.——

This is too sore an evil not to be observed amongst

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persons of all ages, in what is called Higher Life; and so early does the contempt of this great concern begin to shew itself,—that it is no uncommon thing to hear persons disputing against religion, and raising cavils against the Bible, at an age when some of them would be hard set to read a chapter in it!——and, I may add, of those whose stock in knowledge is somewhat larger, that, for the most part, it has scarce any other foundation to rest on but the sinking credit of traditional and second-hand objections against revelation; which, had they leisure to read, they would find answered and confuted a thousand times over.—But this by the way.——

If we take a view of the public worship of Almighty God, and observe in what manner it is reverenced by persons in this rank of life, whose duty it is to set an example to the poor and ignorant, we shall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonstration of a sense of our duty towards God, as if religion was a business fit only to employ tradesmen and mechanics—and the salvation of our souls, a concern utterly below the consideration of a person of figure and consequence.—

I shall say nothing at present of the lower ranks of mankind,—though they have not yet got into the fashion of laughing at religion, and treating it with scorn and contempt, and, I believe, are too serious a set of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt it is held in by those whose examples they are apt to imitate, will in time utterly shake their principles, and render them, if not as profane, at least as corrupt as their betters.—When this event happens,—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them

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those who have done the mischief will find the necessity at last of turning religious in their own defence, and, for want of a better principle, to set an example of piety and good morals for their own interest and convenience.

Thus much for the languishing state of religion in the present age; — in virtue and good morals, perhaps, the account may stand higher.——

Let us inquire.——

And here I acknowledge, that an inexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry against vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude that the whole world was in an uproar about it,— and that there was so general a horror and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence than hearsay—let us see, in the present, how the one case is contradicted by the other.—

However vehement we approve ourselves in discourse against vice — I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it actually meets with is very different;—the conduct and behaviour of the world is so opposite to their language, and all we hear so contradicted by what we see, as to leave little room to question which sense we are to trust.——

Look, I beseech you, amongst those whose higher stations are made a shelter for the liberties they take: — you will see, that no man's character is so infamous, nor any woman so abandoned as not to be visited and admitted freely into all companies;

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and if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, caressed, and flattered. — If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue, — take a short view of the general decay of it from the fashionable excesses of the age,—in favour of which there seems to be formed so strong a party, that a man of sobriety, temperance, and regularity, scarce knows how to accommodate himself to the society he lives in, —and is oft as much at a loss how and where to dispose of himself;—and, unless you suppose a mixture of constancy in his temper, it is great odds but such a one would be ridiculed, and laughed out of his scruples and his virtue at the same time,—to say nothing of occasional rioting, chambering, and wantonness. Consider how many public markets are established merely for the sale of virtue, — where the manner of going too sadly indicates the intention; —and the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

The sinning under disguise, I own, seems to carry some appearance of a secret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as such, was it not the only public instance the world seems to give of it. In other cases, a just sense of shame seems a matter of so little concern, that, instead of any regularity of behaviour, you see thousands who are tired with the very form of it, and who, at length, have even thrown the mask of it aside, as a useless piece of incumbrance.—This, I believe, will need no evidence, it is too evidently seen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to say of religion, but) of decency and common good manners;—so that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices, which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly

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show their face in broad day, and ofttimes with such an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himself honour, — or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a state of guilt, was as necessary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.

If we pass on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a softer name for vices), you will scarce see any thing, in what is called Higher Life, but what bespeaks a general relaxation of all order and discipline, in which our opinions as well as manners seem to be set loose from all order and restraints, — and, in truth, from all serious reflections too:—and one may venture to say, that gaming and extravagance, to the utter ruin of the greatest estates,—minds dissipated with diversions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the most general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at least the more solemn seasons of the year, set apart for the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, should give some check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongst us, that it is so?—what one alteration does it make in the course of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification insulted by the same luxury of entertainments at our tables? — is not the same order of diversions perpetually returning, and scarce any thing else thought of?—does not the same levity in dress, as well as discourse, shew itself in persons of all ages? I say of all ages, for it is no small aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which, by its authority, was once able to frown youth into sobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, seems but too often to lead the way, and,

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by their unseasonable example, give a countenance to follies and weakness, which youth is but too apt to run into without such a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, should have nothing about it but what looks like a decent preparation for it! In purer times, it was the case; —but now, grey hairs themselves scarce ever appear but in the high mode and flaunting garb of youth, —with heads as full of pleasure, and clothes as ridiculously, and as much in the fashion, as the person who wears them is usually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a short reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldest equal the youngest in the vanity of their dress, there is no reason to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not surpass them, in the vanity of their desires.

But this by the bye.—

Though, in truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of this discourse,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light hand, but plainly to point them out; that by recalling to your mind what manner of persons we really are, I might better lead you to the apostle's inference, of what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God.—

The apostle, in the concluding verse of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for such things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the reason or the passions of men, are to be wrought upon at all, it must be from the force and influence of this awakening consideration in the text,—'That all these things

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'shall be dissolved;'—that this vain and perishable scene must change: that we who now tread the stage, must shortly be summoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, hastening unto the place from whence we shall return no more;—that whilst we are here,—our conduct and behaviour is minutely observed;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whose omniscient eye spies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the passages of our lives;—that these volumes shall be produced and opened, and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them;—that, without respect to persons, we shall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words, and actions, to this greatest and best of Beings, before whose judgment seat we must finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good or whether they are bad.—

That to add to the terror of it, this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night;—of that hour no one knoweth;——that we are not sure of its being suspended one day or one hour; or, what is the same case,—that we are standing upon the edge of a precipice with nothing but the single thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtless state, we are lost, and must perish for evermore!—

What manner of persons ought we to be, upon these principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy conversation and godliness;—and I shall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looing for and hastening unto the coming of God, under such a life, is, from that of spending our days in vanity, and our years in pleasure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude, in that

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merciful warning, which our Savour, the Judge himself, hath given us at the close of the same exhortation:—

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life;—and so that day come upon you unawares; for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.——Watch, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Which may God of his mercy grant, through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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SERMON XXXI.

ST. PETER'S CHARACTER.

ACTS iii. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

THESE words, as the text tells us, were spoken by St. Peter, on the occasion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and, in the beginning of this chapter, had asked an alms of St. Peter and St. John, as they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter fastening his eyes, as in the 4th verse, and declaring he had no such relief to give him as he expected, having neither silver nor gold,—but that such as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Master, he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to rise up and walk:—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ancle-bones received strength; and he leaped up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praising God.—

It seems he had been born lame, had passed a whole life of despair, without hopes of ever being restored;—so that the immediate sense of strength and activity

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communicated to him at once, in so surprising and unsought-for a manner, cast him into the transport of mind natural to a man so benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing instance of a supernatural power;—the notoriety of the fact, wrought at the hour of prayer;—the unexceptionableness of the object,—that it was no imposture,—for they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple;—the unfeigned expressions of an enraptured heart almost beside itself, confirming the whole;—the man that was healed, in the 10th verse, holding his benefactors, Peter and John,—entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God;—the great concourse of people drawn together by this event, in the 11th verse,—for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Sure never was such a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have established a character of superior goodness and power!—To a man set upon this world, who sought his own praise and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned these circumstances to such a purpose;—to have fallen in with the passions of an astonished and grateful city, prepossessed, from what had happened so strongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requisite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the highest reverence of his sanctity, awe of his person, or whatever other belief should be necessary to feed his pride, or serve secret ends of glory and interest.—A mind not sufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God—and transferred it to himself.—He might—not so a disciple of Christ: for when Peter saw it,—when he saw the propensity in them to be misled on this occasion,—he answered and said

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unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?—The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.——

O holy and blessed apostle.

How would thy meek and mortified spirit satisfy itself in uttering so humble and so just a declaration? What an honest triumph wouldst thou taste the sweets of,—in thus conquering thy passion of vain-glory,—keeping down thy pride,—disclaiming the praises which should have fed it, by telling the wondering spectators, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holiness, which had wrought this—thou being of like passions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holiness of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who wast but an instrument in his hands. —If thus honestly declining honour, which the occasion so amply invited thee to take;—If this would give more satisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudest praises of a mistaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection—that, in this instance of self-denial, thou hadst not only done well, —but, what was a still more endearing thought, that thou hadst been able to copy the example of thy divine Master,—who, in no action of his life, sought ever his own praise, but, on the contrary, declined all possible occasions of it;—and, in the only public instance of honour which he suffered to be given him, in his entrance into Jerusalem,—thou didst remember, —it was accepted with such a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hosannahs of the multitude, than in the

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meekness wherewith he received them, lowly and sitting upon an ass.—How could a disciple fail of profiting by the example of so humble a Master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every instance of it, shewed plainly he came not to share the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accomplished, by engrossing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world; and, by the splendour of his court, and dignity of his person, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applause and admiration of the world: ——this every disciple knew was in his power;—so that the meanness of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was engaged, by preaching the Gospel to the poor—the numberless dangers and inconveniences attending the execution, —were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meanest of the people,—amongst whom he appeared rather as a servant than a master, coming not, as he often told them, to be ministered unto, but to minister,—and, as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him, having no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that we should desire him.—

How could a disciple, you'll say, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would suggest had happened of a-piece with it, in the course of his Master's life;—but particularly at the conclusion and great catastrophe of it,—at his crucifixion; the impressions of which could never be forgotten.—When a life full of so many engaging instances of humility was crowned with the most

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endearing one of humbling himself to the death of the cross,—the death of a slave and a malefactor,—suffering himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter,—dragged to Calvary without opposition or complaint, and, as a sheep before his shearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O blessed Jesus! well might a disciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhortedst them all; for thou wast meek and lowly! —well might they profit, when such a lesson was seconded by such an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this must have had on the actions of those who were attendants and constant followers of our Saviour on earth,—saw the meekness of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death,—who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his rescue, or by a single act of omnipotence to have destroyed his enemies, yet suppressed his almighty power,—neither resented—nor revenged the indignity done him, but patiently suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors!—

It could not well be otherwise, but that every eye-witness of this must have been wrought upon, in some degree, as the apostle, to let the same mind be in him which also was in Christ Jesus. Nor will it be disputed how much the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the present transaction might be owing to the impressions he received on that memorable occasion of his Lord's death, sinking still deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many instances his Master had given him of this engaging virtue in the course of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and sensible nature, as we may collect from the sacred writings,

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—a temper fittest to receive all the advantages which such impressions could give:—and therefore, as it is a day and place sacred to this great apostle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time in a short essay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular disposition of heart, which is the subject of the discourse.—

This great apostle was a man of distinction amongst the disciples, — and was one of such virtue and qualifications, as seemed to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

On his first admission to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a most evident testimony that he was a man of real and tender goodness, when, being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fishes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author must necessarily be from God, he fell down instantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection; —'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' —The censure, you will say, expresses him a sinful man;—but so to censure himself, with such unaffected modesty, implies, more effectually than any thing else could,—that he was not, in the common sense of the word, a sinful,—but a good man, who, like the publican in the temple, was no less justified for a self-accusation, extorted merely from the humility of a devout heart jealous of its own imperfections.—And though the words, *Depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear,—yet He who heard them, and knew the heart of the speaker, found they carried in them a greater measure of desire.—For Peter was not willing to be discharged from his new guest, but, fearing his unfitness to accompany him, longed to be made more

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worthy of his conversation. A meek and modest distrust of himself seemed to have had no small share, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved, and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and Master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—An instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other Evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples' feet; to which office not one of them is represented as making any opposition: But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him,—Dost *Thou* wash *my* feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter.—Peter said unto him, —Thou shalt never wash my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his submission,—and he expostulates with him upon it, with all the earnest and tender opposition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with shame, that his Lord and Master should insist to do so mean and painful an act of servitude to him.—

I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life as these, than from the more weighed and important actions,—where a man is more upon his guard, —has more preparation to disguise the true disposition of his heart, — and more temptation when disguised, to impose it on others.

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him

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for art and premeditation; — though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him to the sharpness of a rebuke where he could least bear it.

I take notice of this, because it will help us in some measure to reconcile a seeming contradiction in his character; which will naturally occur here, from considering that great and capital failing of his life, when, by a presumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the disgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted so opposite to the character here given, that you will ask,—How could so humble a man, as you describe, ever have been guilty of so self-sufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he should die with his Master,—yet would he not deny him?—Or whence,—that so sincere and honest a man was not better able to perform it?—

The case was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occasion to admonish his disciples of the peril of lapsing,—telling them (31st verse)—'All ye shall be 'offended because of me this night.'—To which Peter answering, with a zeal mixed with too much confidence,—That though all should be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check this trust in himself,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular should deny him *thrice*. — But Peter looking upon this monition no farther than as it applied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage,—stung to the heart to have them called in question by his Lord,—he hastily summons them all up, to form his

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final resolution,—Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee!—The resolve was noble and dutiful to the last degree,—and I make no doubt as honest a one—that is, both as just in the matter, and as sincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind; his character not suffering us to imagine he made it in a braving dissimulation:—no; —for he proved himself sufficiently in earnest by his subsequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his sword against a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had less concern for his own life than he had for his Master's safety.—How then came his resolution to miscarry?—The reason seems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himself, — doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace assisted him or not;—surely thinking what he had courage to resolve so honestly, he had likewise ability to perform. — This was his mistake; — and though it was a very great one,—yet it was in some degree a-kin to a virtue,—as it sprung merely from a consciousness of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a conclusion of what they would enable him to perform, on the sharpest encounters for his Master's sake:—so that his failing in this point was but a consequence of this hasty and ill-considered resolve:—and his Lord, to rebuke and punish him for it, did no other than leave it to his own strength to perform it;—which, in effect, was almost the same as leaving him to the necessity of not perform-it at all.—The great apostle had not considered, that He who precautioned him was the searcher of all hearts,—and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man:—he did not remember, that his Lord had said before,—'Without

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'me ye can do nothing;'—that the exertions of all our faculties were under the power of His will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture, — where he had so great a temptation to the contrary—though he was full of the persuasion, in every other transaction of his life,—but most visibly here in the text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart still overflowing with remembrance of this very mistake he had once committed; — Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holiness we had wrought this? — The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, — the God of our fathers, through faith in His name, has made this man whole, whom ye see and know.—

This is the best answer I am able to make to this objection against the uniformity of the apostle's character which I have given:—upon which let it be added, —that was no such apology capable of being made in its behalf—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it: — the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities: and, were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man, — the failings and imperfections of a religious man, — the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man, — were they to rise up in judgment against them, —and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss — what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him? — So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls through surprise more than a premedi-

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tation,—one may venture, upon the whole, to sum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man sensible in his nature,—of quick passions, tempered with the greatest humility and most unaffected poverty of spirit that ever met in such a character.—So that, in the only criminal instance of his life, which I have spoken to, you are at a loss which to admire most;—the tenderness and sensibility of his soul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jesus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he testified thereupon, in the bitterness of his sorrow for what he had done. He was once presumptuous in trusting in his own strength; his general and true character was that of the most engaging meekness,—distrustful of himself and his abilities to the last degree.——

He denied his Master.—But in all instances of his life, but that, was a man of the greatest truth and sincerity;—to which part of his character our Saviour has given an undeniable testimony, in conferring on him the symbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the most expressive of constancy and firmness.—

He was a man of great love to his Master—and of no less zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I shall take one instance out of St. John, with which I shall conclude this account,—Where, upon the desertion of several other disciples,—our Saviour puts the question to the twelve,—Will ye also go away?—Then, says the text, Peter answered and said,—Lord! whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, and know, that thou art Christ the Son of God.—Now, if we look into the Gospel, we find that our Saviour pronounced on this very confession,——Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona! for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my

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Father which is in heaven.——That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reason; because reason was able to judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy God, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happiness.—— But for all this,—reason could not infallibly determine that the messenger of this doctrine was the Messias, the eternal Son of the living God:—to know this, required an illumination;—and this illumination, I say, seems to have been vouchsafed at that instant as a reward,—as would have been sufficient evidence by itself of the disposition of his heart.—

I have now finished this short essay upon the character of St. Peter, not with a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon some monastic qualifications, with which a popish pulpit would ring upon such an occasion, without doing much honour to the saint, or good to the audience;— but have drawn it with truth and sobriety, representing it as it was, as consisting of virtues the most worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dresses out her saints on these days,—but upon matters of fact, in the Sacred Scriptures, in which all Christians agree.——And since I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by observing, how ill the spirit and character of that church resembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the subject of this discourse.—— Would one think, that a church, which thrusts itself under this apostle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would presume to exceed the degrees of it, which he acknowledged to possess himself?—But how ill are your expectations answered, when, instead

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of the humble declaration in the text,——'Ye men of 'Israel, marvel not at us, as if our own power and 'holiness had wrought this,'——you hear a language and behaviour from the Romish Court, as opposite to it as insolent words and actions can frame;——

So that, instead of, 'Ye men of Israel, marvel not 'at us,'——Ye men of Israel, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:——Approach our sacred pontiff——(who is not only holy——but holiness itself)—approach his person with reverence, and deem it the greatest honour and happiness of your lives to fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiss his feet:——

Think not, as if it were not our own holiness which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holiness,—the superabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourselves,—from works of supererogation, we have transferred the surplus in ecclesiastic warehouses, and, in pure zeal for the good of your souls, have established public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times:——

Think not, ye men of Israel, or say within yourselves, that we are unprofitable servants;—we have no good works to spare; or, that if we had, we cannot make this use of them;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgences,—and huckster them out, as we do, through all the parts of Christendom:—

Know ye by these presents, that it is our own power which does this,—the plenitude of our apostolic power operating with our own holiness, that enables us to bind and loose, as seems meet to us on earth;——to save your souls, or deliver them up to Satan; and, as we please or displease, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate them all;

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——binding kings in chains, and your nobles in links of iron.——

That we may never again feel the effects of such language and principles,——may God of his mercy grant us! Amen.

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SERMON XXXII.

THIRTIETH OF JANUARY.

EZRA, ix. 6, 7.

And I said, O my God! I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass, unto this day.—

THERE is not, I believe, throughout all history, an instance of so strange and obstinately corrupt a people as the Jews, of whom Ezra complains;—for though, on one hand, there never was a people that received so many testimonies of God's favour to encourage them to be good,—so, on the other hand, there never was a people which so often felt the scourge of their iniquities, to dishearten them from doing evil.—Yet, neither the one nor the other seemed ever able to make them either the wiser or better;—neither God's blessings, nor his corrections, could ever soften them;—they still continued a thankless unthinking people,—who profited by no lessons, neither were to be won by mercies, nor terrified with punishments,—but, on every succeeding trial and occasion, extremely disposed against God, to go astray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with sorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character: and the manner of his appli-

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cation to God is so expressive of his humble sense of it,—and there is something in the words so full of tenderness and shame for them upon that score,—as bespeaks the most paternal, as well as pastoral concern for them.—And he said,—O my God! I am ashamed,—and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.—No doubt the holy man was confounded to look back upon that long series of so many of God's undeserved mercies to them, of which they had made so bad and ungrateful a use: he considered, that they had all the motives that could lay restraints either upon a considerate or a reasonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures, but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition, he had heard their cry and took compassion upon their afflictions, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had set them free from the yoke of oppression.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the same time, that, besides the instance of God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for from second causes and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of God's general concern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people:—in the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he suffered no man to do them wrong; but reproved even kings for their sake;—that when they entered into the promised land, no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession, no army was ever able to drive them out;—that nations, greater and mightier than

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they, were thrust forth from before them;—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of God, to serve them; and that even the sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories;—that when all these mercies were cast away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or interest could make them an obedient people,—God had tried by misfortunes to bring them back;—that when instructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets, and holy guides, had not effect,—he at last suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall into the same state of bondage in Babylon, from whence he had first raised them. —Here it is that Ezra pours out his confession.—It is no small aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this last trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promises and threats, comforts and afflictions, instead of making them grow the better, made them apparently grow the worse. How could he intercede for them, but with shame and sorrow;—and say, as in the text,—'O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my 'face to thee;—for our iniquities are increased over 'our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the 'heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been 'in a great trespass, unto this day!'

Thus much for the prophet's humble confession to God for the Jews, for which he had but too just a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better use of the words, as the occasion of the day led me to the choice of them, than by a serious application of the same sad confession, in regard to ourselves.

Our fathers, like those of the Jews in Ezra's time, no doubt have done amiss, and greatly provoked God

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by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increased over our heads,—if, since the days of our fathers, we have been in great trespass ourselves unto this day,—'tis fit, this day, we should be put in mind of it:—nor can the time and occasion be better employed, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which such a parallel will lead me to give.

It must be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous, as the Jews had;—yet, at the same time, there is no one which has not sufficient (and setting aside at present the consideration of a future state as a reward for being so)—there is no nation under heaven, which, besides the daily blessing of God's providence to them, but have received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay.—There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preserved, by providential discoveries, from plots and designs against the well-being of their states,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink;—by some signal interposition of God's providence,—they may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.

If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—insomuch, that our history, for this last century,

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has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances, and God's blessings;—and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption, as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language besides—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which must have wrought them for us.—Here then let us stop and look back a moment, and inquire, as in the case of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received.

A stranger—when he heard that this island had been so favoured by Heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade, so blessed in our situation and natural product,—and in all of them so often—so visibly protected by Providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our blessings;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured,—that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth.

Would to God there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief!—for, without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say, within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this respect as little as was possible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue,—and as little sense of religion, at least as little of the appearance of it, as can be supposed to exist at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were possessed of—God,—who searcheth the heart,—best knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at least—the form of godliness,—and

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paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at least the appearance and outward garb of it.—The public service of God was better frequented,—and in a devout as well as regular manner:—there was no open profaneness in our streets to put Piety to the blush,—or domestic ridicule to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect;—the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint;—good order and good hours were then kept up in most families; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions;—so that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.

But all this has insensibly been borne down, ever since the days of our forefathers' trespass,—when, to avoid one extreme, we began to run into another;—so that, instead of any great religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the mask of it aside,—as an useless incumbrance.

But this licentiousness, he would say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds:—God has since this tried you with afflictions;—you have been visited with a long and expensive war:—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the flock from the fold,—and left no herd in the stalls.—Surely, he'll say,—two such terrible scourges must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your lands—from such admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteousness for themselves.

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I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope should always be the natural use and improvement from such calamities;—for we often find that numbers, who, in prosperity, seem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and distress. — Yet consider this nationally, — we see no such effect from it, in fact, as one would be led to expect from the speculation:—for instance,—with all the devastation, bloodshed, and expense which the war has occasioned, how many converts has it made to frugality, to virtue, or even to seriousness itself?—The pestilence amongst our cattle,—though it has distressed and utterly undone so many thousands, yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?

And though one would imagine that the necessary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loss of rents and property from the other,—should in some measure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions, as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongst us that it is so?—

What one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it?—Is not there the same luxury and epicurism of entertainments at our tables?—do we not pursue with eagerness the same giddy round of trifling diversions?—is not the infection diffused amongst people of all ranks, and all ages?—and even grey hairs, whose sober example and manners ought to check the extravagant sallies of the thoughtless, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the same costly ornaments, and join the general riot! Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even charity will allow us to suppose that a consciousness of their inability to pursue greater excesses is the only vexation of spirit.—In truth, the observation falls in with

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the main intention of the discourse, — which is not framed to flatter your follies, — but plainly to point them out, and shew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion; which all men see,—and which the wise and good so much lament.

But the inquirer will naturally go on, and say, that though this representation does not answer his expectations, that undoubtedly we must have profited by these lessons in other respects;—that though we have not approved our understanding in the sight of God, by a virtuous use of our misfortunes, to true wisdom,—that we must have improved them, however, to political wisdom:—so that he would say,—Though the English do not appear to be a religious people, they are at least a loyal one;—they have so often felt the scourge of rebellion, and have tasted so much sharp fruit from it, as to have set their teeth on edge for ever.—But, good God! how would he be astonished to find, that though we have been so often tossed to and fro by our own tempestuous humours,—that we were not yet sick of the storm,—that though we solemnly, in every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in staining their hands in blood, we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the same way:—and though the providence of God has set bounds, that they do not work as much mischief as in days of distraction and desolation,—little reason have we to ascribe the merit thereof to our own wisdom;—so that when the whole account is stated betwixt us, and there seems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text,—'that our iniquities are increased over our 'heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. '—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a 'great trespass, unto this day;'—and though it is fit

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and becoming that we weep for them,—'tis much more so, that we weep for ourselves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chastisements of God, or from the sins and provocations of our forefathers.

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of such humiliation;—and unless it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways, the service of this day is more a senseless insult upon the memories of our ancestors,—than an honest design to profit by their mistakes and misfortunes,—and to become wiser and better from our reflections upon them.

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God not to lay their sins to our charge—whilst we have so many remaining of our own.—Unless we are touched for ourselves, how can we expect he should hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however statesmen may dispute about the causes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cause a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to God,—that they are, consequently, the only true basis of our happiness and prosperity on earth:—and however we may shelter ourselves under distinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worst enemy the state has;—and, for the contrary, it will always be found, that a virtuous man is the best patriot and best subject the king has.—And though an individual may say, What will my righteousness profit a nation of men? In answer, if it fail of a blessing here (which is not likely), it will have one advantage, it will save thy

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own soul, and give thee that peace at the last which this world cannot take away.

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant us all! Amen.

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